Leader in the food industry uses GS1 Standards and the Rapid Recall Exchange™ service to perfect its recall and withdrawal plan.

Sun-Maid
One of the Most Trusted Brands in Food Safety

The Sun-Maid Girl® was inspired by a real person – Lorraine Collett Petersen who resided in Fresno, California where Sun-Maid began its operations in 1912. While her look has been modernized over the years, the likeness has stayed true to the original image, giving Sun-Maid unrivaled brand recognition around the world. In addition to its healthy raisins, Sun-Maid offers a full line of dried fruits and even yogurt-coated items in the U.S. and 57 other countries.

Yet, Sun-Maid’s big brand doesn’t mean big-business farming. For close to a century, the company has embraced the benefits that come with smaller, family-owned farms. Sun-Maid is a cooperative owned by nearly 1,000 family farmers who grow raisin grapes in California’s fertile San Joaquin Valley.

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– John Slinkard,
Vice President of Supply Chain

CHALLENGE
Sun-Maid conducts mock product recalls several times each year to always be prepared. The company wanted to improve its process, making it faster and better.

SOLUTION
Sun-Maid helped create the Rapid Recall Exchange service for more comprehensive communications with retailers. Coupled with its use of GS1 Standards to trace raisins back to growers, the company is well-positioned for a product recall and market withdrawal.

BENEFITS
- By using GS1 Standards like Global Trade Item Numbers® and EPC-enabled RFID tags, Sun-Maid can trace its raisins back to the grower. This speeds the recall/withdrawal process.
- Rapid Recall Exchange gives Sun-Maid one source to deliver comprehensive and accurate information to all retailers, eliminating any confusion and saving valuable time.
- With Rapid Recall Exchange, Sun-Maid knows which retailers receive and open the notification, and when. It also provides a way for Sun-Maid to dialogue directly with retailers.

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Always Prepared
Sun-Maid has never had a product recall. Yet, that doesn’t mean the company isn’t prepared. “A few years ago, we had some withdrawals – cosmetic issues that we felt didn’t live up to Sun-Maid standards,” says Slinkard. “For example, some of our apricots were a bit dark. They were perfectly fine to eat, but we didn’t want to disappoint consumers so we withdrew them.”

During the withdrawals, Sun-Maid worked through its network of brokers to notify retailers.

“Many of our growers are multi-generation farmers,” explains John Slinkard, vice president of Supply Chain. “We’re like a family business with a strong brand to protect. The Sun-Maid Girl represents us, and we take all aspects of what we deliver to customers personally.”

Having worked in virtually every part of the business, Slinkard fully appreciates the value of Sun-Maid’s reputation and products.
CASE STUDY: Sun-Maid

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“We would inform our brokers, and then they would communicate to our retailers, asking for confirmation,” explains Mary Terjeson, vice president of Trade Funds & Sales Administration. Terjeson creates and distributes all communications on behalf of Sun-Maid to its brokers. “While our brokers were very responsive, it still took extra time since we didn’t have a direct connection to our retailers.” Terjeson and Slinkard knew the process could be improved, making withdrawals better and faster.

In 2008, Slinkard heard that GS1 US™, in collaboration with the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), was developing an online recall service. Now called the Rapid Recall Exchange, the tool allows a supplier to efficiently send an e-mail message to their retailers 24/7, alerting them about a product recall or market withdrawal.

“Food safety has always been a priority for Sun-Maid. We haven’t had a recall, but we have always had a recall and withdrawal plan,” says Slinkard. “When we heard about the concept of a recall service that everyone could benefit from, we signed up to help make it a reality.”

Both Slinkard and Terjeson provided input, tested and gave feedback to make the Rapid Recall Exchange service “close to being perfect.”

Slinkard adds, “If we had to do a recall, I’m confident Rapid Recall Exchange would perform flawlessly for us.”

The Perfect Tool

As a major contributor to the Rapid Recall Exchange, Sun-Maid points to some of the features that make it an important part of the company’s product recall and market withdrawal process.

Rapid Recall Exchange eliminates any confusion about products being recalled or withdrawn. “It gives us a standard format for creating a notification so that all impacted retailers get the information they need to take action. I don’t miss critical information that should be included. I can also attach images, handling and reimbursement instructions, and other documents to clarify what products should be withdrawn,” says Terjeson.

“It gives us one source to deliver comprehensive and accurate withdrawal information to all of our retailers, yet we can also target a specific retailer, providing information that applies to only them,” adds Slinkard. “It would be a significant time saver for us, and our retailers would not waste time on products they do not carry.”

Perhaps the biggest benefit for Sun-Maid is the ability for dialogue with retailers.

“With Rapid Recall Exchange, we will know which retailers receive and open our notification, and when. They can come back to us with questions and advise us of their actions,” comments Terjeson. “And the fact that all this information is together in one place is very important.”

Tracing Each Step

Leaving nothing to chance, Sun-Maid conducts mock recalls several times each year. The mock recall process starts with tracing the identified product lot back to the grower. To do this, Slinkard describes how Sun-Maid uses GS1 Standards in its supply chain.

“Our growers deliver the raisins in bins with EPC-enabled RFID tags. We clean the raisins, add some moisture, and package them in either cartons, boxes or bags with Global Trade Item Numbers® (GTINs®). The GTINs, encoded in Universal Product Codes (barcodes), uniquely identify the item. These individual items are packed together in cases with ITF-14 barcodes, and the pallets have license plate barcodes on them,” explains Slinkard.

The next step would be to notify brokers and retailers; Rapid Recall Exchange is an integral part of this. While an e-mail is not sent to retailers during a mock recall, Sun-Maid has thoroughly tested the Rapid Recall Exchange service.

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“We’re focused on getting more and more retailers to join so that we can utilize its full potential,” says Slinkard. “We’re helping to raise awareness by reaching out to our retailers. They need to know that the Rapid Recall Exchange is a great tool. I’m convinced if they learn about the service, they will be eager to sign up!”

The major measurement for Sun-Maid mock recalls is time. “We have a targeted timeframe, which is measured in hours, for our traces,” says Slinkard. “We’ve been 100 percent successful in our ability to perform traces.”

Using GS1 Standards such as GTINs encoded in barcodes, Sun-Maid can trace raisins back to the grower. With Rapid Recall Exchange, GS1 Standards and its people in place, Sun-Maid is prepared to perform a successful withdrawal, or if needed, a recall at any time. Slinkard sums up his goal in this way. “Our plan is to never have to use Rapid Recall Exchange. But, if we ever do, we’re confident it will help us be successful.”

Perfecting the Process
Sun-Maid stresses priority practices for a top recall/withdrawal process.

1. Conduct mock recalls at least three times a year.

2. Assign someone within your organization to schedule and announce the recall. To be effective, mock recalls must be unannounced.

3. Put GS1 Standards in place to enable traceability of products throughout the supply chain.

4. Recalls can happen anytime. Have a 24/7 back-up plan and people ready to assume responsibility.

5. Practice, practice, practice to be truly prepared.

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The Sun-Maid plant in Kingsburg, California showcases innovative processing technologies for quality products from vineyard to package.
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CASE STUDY: Sun-Maid

Rapid Recall Exchange™ applies industry expertise and best practices to standardize product recall and withdrawal notifications between retailers/wholesalers and suppliers. It is an online service which enables prompt, accurate, and secure information exchange to protect consumers. To learn more contact GS1 US at +1 937.610.4233 or visit www.rapidrecallexchange.org.

ABOUT SUN-MAID

Since 1912, Sun-Maid has served consumers and customers by providing premium quality raisins and dried fruits from the raisin and fruit farms of California to homes and eating establishments around the world. As a cooperative, Sun-Maid Growers of California is owned by nearly 1,000 family farmers who grow raisin grapes all located in the San Joaquin Valley of California. With close to 100 years of experience, Sun-Maid offers unmatched expertise in the Raisin and Dried Fruit industry. www.sun-maid.com

ABOUT GS1 US™

GS1 US is a not-for-profit organization that brings industry communities together to solve supply-chain problems through the adoption and implementation of GS1 standards. More than 200,000 businesses in 25 industries rely on GS1 US for trading-partner collaboration and for maximizing the cost effectiveness, speed, visibility, security and sustainability of their business processes. They achieve these benefits through GS1 US solutions based on GS1 global unique numbering and identification systems, barcodes, Electronic Product Code-based RFID, data synchronization, and electronic information exchange. GS1 US also manages the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code® (UNSPSC®). www.GS1US.org

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATIONS

The Food Marketing Institute (FMI) provides leadership to retailers and wholesalers of food and consumer products, as well as to their supplier partners, by fostering their growth and promoting their role in feeding families and enriching the lives of their customers. www.fmi.org

The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) is the voice of more than 300 businesses in the consumer packaged goods industry and related fields. The GMA serves large, international and regional brands, and foodservice companies and industry service providers. www.gmaonline.org

The Rapid Recall Exchange service is endorsed by the National Grocers Association (N.G.A.). The N.G. A. is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry. www.nationalgrocers.org