

PRIMS and Lot Tracking Frequently Asked Questions:

Will the PRIMS software integrate with the plant's sales/accounting software?

Yes, the PRIMS software has a special module to make the data flow between different software.

How will PRIMS talk to my current accounting database?

PRIMS can communicate to any system that has an ODBC database. The data PRIMS generates, finished production and inventory used, can be either read by your system, or the PRIMS software can send the data files based on time or clicking a send button. PRIMS also can also be purchased with a Sequel Server data base option.

Is PRIMS easy to use?

PRIMS was designed to be easy to work with. The supervisor can learn how to put in recipes and create a work plan in minutes. The operator terminals are also designed to be easy to use, and intuitive, with self-instructing screens, while the screens are multilingual.

Are the operator terminals washdown?

Yes, they are made to take the abuse of a food plant floor. They are rated NEMA 4X wash down duty, and are non-corrosive.

What do you do if you have identified numerous ingredient lot numbers for one ingredient going into a batch?

The FDA ruling states that ingredient lot number tracking must be done, where it is reasonably achievable. Where multiple lots of an ingredient are being stored in a common silo (in the case of flour), or tank (in the case of corn syrup), it would not be possible since each added lot is dispersed and commingled with the ones stored. However, in the case where multiple lot numbers are being added to a batch, it is reasonable to record. PRIMS has the ability to record up to 3 lot numbers for each ingredient in each batch, which should be more than sufficient.

What is considered a Batch?

A Batch is an amount of ingredients put into a mixer and processed. A shift, or production day can be considered a batch, but does not obtain the true objective of the Act.

What about the issues of scrap and rework used in a batch?

In many types of food production, scrap (such as the trimmings from dough sheeting or cutting equipment), and rework (damaged or malformed product) are reintroduced into the production line. In the case of introducing it into the mixer, it can be identified as to which batch it came from, but when it is introduced into the process line after batching, it becomes more complex.

PRIMS however, simplifies this. There are two approaches towards a solution. The simplest one is to record that a certain percentage is from the previous batch, however, if the rework or scrap is far removed in time from the previous batch, this is not possible. The more complex approach requires the batch identification and separation of the scrap or rework, and then recording the introduction of it into the present batch.

With PRIMS, automated batch and ingredient lot tracking with programmable controllers and operator terminals is made much easier. It must be kept in mind that new operational procedures will need to be implemented with production employees. Also keep in mind that there is a major benefit to be gained in improved quality control.

What about the issue of batches being dropped, one after another into the same piece of equipment? Don't they tend to commingle?

PRIMS takes this into account and actually identifies the associated numbers in the system.

What is the real intention behind Title III?

The real intention is to minimize and reduce the consequences of an instance of contamination or poisoning of a food product. Although food manufacturers may consider this a simple matter of recall, the government is looking at the bigger picture. The FDA at the direction of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), has established a program for ensuring the safety and security of food supply.

The FDA is employing overall strategies to develop capacity for identification of a specific threat or attack on the food supply, develop effective protection strategies to "shield" the food supply from terrorist threats, develop capacity for a rapid, coordinated response to a food borne terrorist attack, and to develop capacity for a rapid, coordinated recovery. It is a matter of reducing medical response times, being able to focus on a smaller area of the population, and having the ability to bring in antidotes to specific hospitals, clinics and doctors, etc.

The events of September 11, 2001, heightened the nation's awareness and placed a renewed focus on ensuring the protection of the nation's critical infrastructures. A terrorist attack on the food supply could pose both severe public health and economic impacts, while damaging the public's confidence in the food we eat. Several food incidents since the fall of 2001 highlight the significance of the FDA's food security activities. In the fall of 2002, a restaurateur in China added a chemical compound to his competitor's food and killed dozens of people and sent hundreds more to hospitals. Also in the fall of 2002, three individuals were arrested in Jerusalem for allegedly planning to carry out a mass poisoning of patrons at a local cafe. One of the arrested individuals worked as a chef at the cafe. In January 2003, several individuals were arrested in Britain for plotting to add ricin to the food supply on a British military base. Each of these incidents shows the potential for the nation's food supply to be used in an attack.

Imagine the Implications of this Scenario:

A frozen food manufacturer has received 10 skids of raisins. Several skids are poisoned; these skids are used between a two day period and the contaminated batches are made on two different days. Some of the finished product goes to supermarkets and some goes through a wholesaler, which is further distributed, the possibility of delivery being a seven state area.

The FDA would need a task force of thousands, and an immense amount of time would be required to respond to the disaster. Instead of a few lives, hundreds if not thousands of lives would be lost. The effect would be a loss of confidence in the food supply (probably in the category of the food infected, bread, cake, candy, or snack food) by the public. Of course the public would abstain from consuming that food for a long time out of sheer fear. The business of that food group would suffer huge losses, businesses would collapse, employees let go, suppliers to those companies would lose business and many would also let employees go.

It is a domino effect that the government is well aware of, and trying, with the passing of this ACT, to prevent. The economic effect would be as damaging as the loss of life. We must do what it takes to defeat these terrorists before they get started. We must put up a shield and protect our food supply.