

Abstract

Rising income levels in many parts of the world and rapid advancements in transportation and communication technologies have accelerated the movement of goods and services across distant locations. The movement of large quantities of agri-food materials over short periods of time across diverse markets is important in addressing national and household food security; but this has also created consumer concerns about information on the source and safety of food that they consume. Even when food materials are produced and consumed within the same geographical location, consumer demand for information about the origin, production inputs, handling practices, and processing history of the food they purchase has become an important quality cue in food and agribusiness trade. Microbial contamination of fresh and processed food products, including fruit and vegetables, and the emergence of new food related threats and health hazards such as BSE or mad cow disease, dioxin and bird flu in poultry, and the ongoing public concern about the long-term impacts of genetically modified food products on human health have contributed to the demand for traceability in food quality and safety management programs. In this paper, we examine the evolution of traceability as important criteria in the assurance of food quality and safety. An overview of existing regional and national legislative framework for food traceability is presented, and we conclude by discussing the results of our recent study on consumer attitudes towards food traceability in the Sultanate of Oman.