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Reporting of traceability and food safety data in the culinary herb and spice chains

Sara Schaarschmidt\textsuperscript{a,*}, Franziska Spradau\textsuperscript{b}, Helmut Mank\textsuperscript{b}, Petra Hiller\textsuperscript{a}, Bernd Appel\textsuperscript{a}, Juliane Bräunig\textsuperscript{a}, Heidi Wichmann-Schauer\textsuperscript{a}, Anneluise Mader\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Department Biological Safety, Max-Dohrn-Str. 8-10, 10589 Berlin
\textsuperscript{b} Fuchs Gewürze GmbH, Industriestraße 25, 49201 Dissen a.T.W., Germany

* Corresponding author. Email address: s.schaarschmidt@posteo.de

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Abstract

Reporting of information is crucial to enable backward and forward tracing of food along the chain, which is of main importance in case of non-compliance with legal obligations on food safety. Thus, food business operators in the European Union (EU) must enable tracing of any foodstuff one step forward and one step back. However, flux of information relevant for traceability and food safety can be a challenge in the supply chains of dried culinary herbs and spices.

Results of a survey among herb/spice businesses – either located within the EU or exporting dried herbs/spices to the EU – showed the widespread use of electronic systems for recording and processing of traceability/food safety data. However, automated capture of transaction data and automated read-out/processing of reported data were rare. The survey indicates that besides electronic documents, typed paper documents are often exchanged between businesses. For data delivery along the chain, paper documents filled in by hand are still used – even in the EU or upon import to the EU. The document type as well as the forms varied, particularly in case of incoming herbs/spices. The forms used for reporting by the survey participants or by their suppliers covered mostly individual/company-specific forms. Standardised forms provided by herb/spice associations were rarely shared between these businesses. The extent of reporting of traceability data upon import to the EU and within the EU appears to be sufficient. Some additional traceability data that promote product tracing, such as the country of harvest, were frequently reported. Same was true for information on food safety hazards.

Keywords: business-to-business reporting, chemical hazards, electronic reports, microbiological hazards, recording, food tracing
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