

## Paper trail fading as online storage grows

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Electronic systems for collection and storage of food safety assurance information look set to become the norm as certification standards owners such as US-based Safe Quality Food (SQF) and the British Retail Consortium (BRC) move to online data access in an attempt to reduce the costs of audits and speed access to information.



SQF is developing a new web site and is working closely with Muddy Boots Quickfire software for data collection and entry and Agentric's for an online database to simplify use of its standard by suppliers, buyers and certifiers. This is expected to be ready by the end of July. "We will be moving away from paper audits and to electronic collection across the board," says SQF Institute executive director Paul Ryan.

Like SQF, the BRC also plans to move to more online content for its standard to simplify use for suppliers, buyers and certifiers, although its systems will not be ready until early next year, says Dr Geoff Spriegel, the BRC's director of global standards and technical services.

At last month's Foodex Meatex exhibition in Birmingham two different companies demonstrated new systems for collecting shopfloor data electronically.

Applied Principles displayed its Quality Manager and Issue Manager systems, which are being used by bagged salad company Kanes Foods of Evesham to remove paper from the factory floor and provide real-time checks. Various parameters, including pictures, are captured at critical control points around the plant on handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs). With the systems, non conformances can be highlighted and 'what to do next' instructions issued.

"Paperless quality control represented a perfect extension of our drive for automation," says Kanes' technical auditor Richard Leathers. "Managing audit tasking is a cinch as the software allows us to easily create our own questions and tasks for each critical control point."

Similarly, Shire Systems showed its Food Sentinel software for food safety assurance and quality compliance. Food Sentinel is hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP)-based and is said to enable fingertip control, via a personal digital assistant, of regulatory and quality compliance auditing and monitoring programmes.