

New report compares global food traceability regulations and requirements of 21 countries

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The Global Food Traceability Center (GFTC) just released a new report in the peer-reviewed journal, *Comprehensive Reviews in Food Science and Food Safety*, that evaluates and compares the traceability regulations of 21 Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries. One of its main findings is that European Union countries ranked highest when it comes to global food traceability regulations and requirements.

"While there are a variety of benefits to global trading of [food](#) items, there are also many complications, particularly when it comes to tracing products internationally in the event of foodborne illness, animal or plant disease, or product recall," said Sylvain Charlebois, PhD, Professor in the College of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph, one of the authors of the report. "This report provides a comparative assessment to aid in discussions concerning harmonization of food traceability requirements and where countries can continue to focus on improvements."

The authors evaluated and ranked each country based on aggregated responses to a series of questions developed to assess their traceability policies and programs. The questions asked whether mandatory traceability regulations exist at the national level; if regulations include imported products, and the nature of required documentation for imports; if an electronic database for traceability exists and if present, its accessibility; and if labeling regulations allow consumer access to help their understanding of traceability.

Member countries of the European Union, which include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Norway and Switzerland, all scored as Superior. Australia, Canada, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, and the United States received an overall ranking score of Average. China received an overall world ranking of Poor. Data from the Russian Federation was insufficient, so it was not ranked.

"Currently, the complexity of following food through a global supply chain makes the process of traceability slow and inefficient in times of crisis," said Brian Sterling, Managing Director of the Global Food Traceability Center, one of the authors of the report. "This is why it's imperative that traceability requirements and regulations be harmonized across the globe. Industry and regulators need to minimize the potential for misunderstanding and delays due to difficulties in understanding each country's practices. Harmonizing requirements has been shown to mitigate unnecessary costs of compliance."

The questions and overall rankings can be viewed in the full report. Summaries of traceability systems of the evaluated countries are as follows:

EU Countries (Superior)—Regulations addressing the traceability of a broad range of foods and animal products of both domestic and imported origin have established those countries adopting EU legislation as strong leaders in global food traceability.

Japan (Average)—Even though Japan's beef labeling law for farm-to-fork traceability is now applicable only on domestic products, the Japanese government has adopted new regulations on rice traceability as well as other various commodities. This places Japan in a 'fast-track' position in food traceability.

Canada (Average)—Traceability requirements through mandatory livestock identification are being strengthened. However, the efforts to create a national traceability system have failed to produce anything beyond limited livestock tracking.

United States (Average)—While the new Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is expected to improve food traceability capabilities for commodities, the development of regulations is still in the early stages. The U.S. does have robust identification and labeling requirements of packaged food products but is one of only two major beef producing countries without a national cattle identification or traceability system.

Australia, New Zealand and Brazil (Average)—These countries have strong livestock identification and traceability systems, but need to develop more advanced traceability requirements for other domestic and imported foods. Requirements for being able to trace and track most foods from farm to fork are still absent.

China (Poor)—The traceability system in China is still under development, and traceability is largely unregulated. China has recently announced impending changes to its food traceability laws.

Russian Federation—Little information was available for determining traceability requirements and regulations, therefore this country was not scored.

The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) launched the Global Food Traceability Center, a not-for-profit collaborative, public-private partnership, in September 2013. The GFTC brings together key stakeholders to collaborate on food traceability and serves as an authoritative voice, and science-based, unbiased resource on food traceability. It assists companies, industries, and government agencies to better understand the nature of food traceability and its requirements,

how to use technologies to improve responsiveness and reliability in the event of food-related emergencies, and how to reap the value and commercial benefits of food traceability.

More information: The complete report is available online:
[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1541-4337.12101/](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1541-4337.12101)

Provided by Institute of Food Technologists

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