

YottaMark's Tech Goes Back To The Farm

By Tomio Geron 8/6/2009

Elliot Grant started YottaMark Inc. in 2005 with an idea to prevent counterfeiting that had become rampant in industries such as pharmaceuticals, electronics and other areas.

Based on Grant's experience as a former executive at Portola Packaging Inc., YottaMark started selling a product for easily labeling and identifying the authenticity of such products.

However, the September 2006 outbreak of E. coli in spinach and other subsequent food scares convinced Grant to create a solution for a completely different industry: produce, which has often been difficult to identify because of the maze of producers, suppliers and distributors of many food products.

"He realized he could speed the response time for food recalls but also connect consumers to farmers," said YottaMark Chief Executive Scott Carr. The result was HarvestMark, a computerized labeling system for identifying the source and other details of produce.

The HarvestMark label includes a bar code that can be printed on a bag of lettuce or attached as a sticker to a single item, such as a watermelon. The company integrates with existing packaging suppliers so that virtually no new technology is needed in the farming and harvesting process.

YottaMark last raised \$10 million in Series B financing from ATA Ventures, Thomvest and Granite Ventures in July 2008. The company raised unspecified Series A financing in 2005.

The service is now used on dozens of produce brands and thousands of farms, and those numbers are expected to double by the first quarter of 2010, Carr said. Since virtually all producers are already using stickers or packaging for their produce, the cost to add HarvestMark is minimal, Carr said.

"We got our boots dirty and hung out with crews in the fields and gone to packing houses to figure out how to make it easy to deploy," Carr said. Using the bar code, anyone can trace the origin of produce to the original producer and get detailed data, down to the specific location within a particular farm. The producer can decide how much information to make public.

Congress has discussed passing laws to require identification of the origin of food, but YottaMark's technology could answer some of those concerns. "We're a tool to help speed the investigation of food safety incidents," Carr said.

This will not only help identify the source of dangerous products, but also help supermarkets in being able to quickly tell customers that their stores are not affected by a certain recall.

<http://www.yottamark.com>