

The company says its new BT Foodnet service can be used to aggregate RFID and other auto-ID data about food-related materials and products and share it across the supply chain.

By Jonathan Collins

July 28, 2006—[BT Auto-ID Services](#), the RFID unit of [British Telecom](#), has launched its first industry-specific managed service. The company hopes its new BT Foodnet service will help pull together data relating to materials and products used in the food industry and share it across the supply chain. The sources of data would be RFID and other auto-identifications systems, whether closed-loop or open-loop.

The managed offering aims to provide client companies access to detailed information relating to products—theirs and those of other companies—moving through the supply chain.

BT believes the sharing of data derived even from closed-loop RFID and two-dimensional and linear bar-codes auto-ID deployments can provide significant benefits to players within the food supply chain. For example, with greater supply chain visibility, suppliers could reduce the practice of overdelivering products to avoid paying penalties for underdelivery. It maintains that closed-loop systems deployed initially for processes within a company can deliver benefits across the industry when those systems' data is shared. A company tracking its own food trays, for example, may just want to know their locations to protect those assets, but if data showing which trays are in use in the supply chain is shared and that information is linked to the food items the trays are carrying, that data can help trace those items for that stage of the food supply chain.

"Companies could choose to share as much or as little of the information they collect," says Eddie Dodds, CTO at BT Auto-ID Services.

Food recalls can affect the entire supply chain—from the retailer all the way back to a single, potentially contaminated ingredient. But it may be hard to trace which particular batch of an ingredient was used in the making of the recalled food. "It can be very difficult to get hold of the right information," says Dodds. "Requests have to be made from company to company, and much of the information is either not kept at a granular level or is paper-based, not electronic, so it can't be accessed quickly enough."

Greater traceability is also increasingly a regulatory requirement that BT believes can be delivered more efficiently through its Foodnet service.

BT Auto-ID Services says it developed the Foodnet service following its own work with nearly a hundred food-sector companies that were interested in, or were using aspects of, the firm's services. BT launched its first bundled RFID managed service, [AssetIntelligence](#), in February (see [BT Debuts Managed RFID Service](#)). Geared toward asset tracking, [AssetIntelligence](#) bundles together RFID equipment, system design and deployment and the software and server hardware needed to collect and distribute the data. It uses active RFID tags and readers (interrogators) from BT partner [Wavetrend](#)

BT Auto-ID Launches Service for Food Supply Chain

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[Technologies](#) and a BT-hosted version of [RedPrairie](#)'s mobile Resource Management (MRM) asset-management application.

The foundation for the BT Foodnet service offering is BT Auto-ID's collaborative data-exchange platform and network infrastructure, which will enable Foodnet to take auto-ID data and share it in an understandable format with its subscriber customers. Foodnet clients will be able to pay on a per-transaction basis or a fixed fee. No pricing details are available.

The company says it is working on similar offerings specific to other industries, but has yet to set a date for their launch.