

A Spanish technology company has praised the European Commission for passing legislation that paves the way for laser labeling on fruit, after three years of negotiations with authorities to outline its benefits for the supply chain. 

Materials used in the process like iron oxides and hydroxides can now be used to permanently mark fruit surfaces without depigmentation without harming the product in any way, according to amended annexes in EC regulation 1333/2008.

A Laser Food release highlighted the decision as a "breakthrough", allowing companies to brand names onto fruit while saving money on paper labels, in addition to bringing greater traceability to retailers through QR matrix codes.

"The unanimous approval of this regulation and its publication in the official journal of the European Union represents the beginning of new era in the labelling of fresh produce since it's not just going to enable guaranteed traceability, but it can also do this in an indelible form," said managing director Jaime Sanfelix.

"Consumers will have absolute certainty that the product they are buying is fully guaranteed because it will have identification marked on its skin that ensures that.

"We began developing the technology that will today make this new era possible with the belief that it was important to give greater visibility to products that were sold anonymously because they are removed from cartons to go on sale they lose all identity."

Sanfelix said the company submitted its original requests to amend the section three years ago, and the approval process involved European Commission scientific committee meetings, technical studies, laboratory tests, residue analysis and an "unending" exchange of information with Commission scientists.

"The introduction of this new form of labelling will bring advantages to all stakeholders in the fresh fruit market

"It is useful, efficient and cost-effective and for this reason retailers should back the recommendations of the European Commission and bring the advantages that this new development offers to consumers."

For José Bruñó, from Spanish citrus and melon exporter Hermanos Bruñó, the technology assures clients that its products are clearly identified, while also adding value to the firm's own brands.

"With this new system, we will be able to do everything at the same time because Laser Food's system will do the printing, avoiding the need for paper labels," he said.

"Without a doubt, clients are very interested in the advantages this technology can offer and we are receiving more and more enquiries about the system, especially for supporting 'ad hoc' marketing campaigns for events like Halloween or Valentine's Day."

Another grower, Pep Barrabeig from Tarragona-based grower Verdcamp Fruits, said retailers had been asking to use the technology.

"We have started working with supermarkets that have asked for this system to avoid problems with the false-selling of fruit, which can happen when the paper label is removed," he said.

"With this system, every piece of fruit can be indelibly branded, plus we are also able to offer complete traceability for every product."

Barrabeig believed the system would eventually supersede traditional forms of labeling entirely.

"During the initial years, the two systems will continue to coexist until consumers become accustomed to the new form of labelling.

"But without a doubt, the use of paper labels will decrease and very probably disappear."

Almeria-based Agrupaejido's marketing and communications director David Baños disagreed that the technology would mean the end of conventional labels, as there would still be a need for labeling cartons and containers.

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