

U.S. supermarket chain Albertsons is joining the blockchain-based IBM Food Trust network and will begin piloting the technology to improve how food is traced from farm to store shelf.

Blockchain is a system of record that establishes a shared environment for food transactions in which all participants can collaborate in a highly secured and transparent way.

Food Trust enables network members to share digital, distributed and immutable data, so that stakeholders across the supply chain can work together to trace and authenticate products or optimize supply chain processes. The solution creates a digital record of transactions or interactions - from a packaging date, to the temperature at which an item was shipped, to its arrival on a grocery shelf.

Albertsons Companies, which operates nearly 2,300 stores across the U.S., will pilot Food Trust for tracing bulk romaine lettuce from one of its distribution centers, then will explore expanding to other food categories throughout its distribution network.

It says it plans to pilot the solution to help overcome the obstacles that have existed when a traceback is initiated for a product like romaine and is evaluating ways to use the technology to highlight the provenance of its extensive Own Brands portfolio.

"Blockchain technology has the potential to be transformational for us as we further build differentiation on our fresh brand," said Anuj Dhanda, Chief Information Officer, Albertsons Companies.

"Food safety is a very significant step. In addition, the provenance of the products enabled by blockchain — the ability to track every move from the farm to the customer's basket — can be very empowering for our customers."

"Multiple high-profile consumer advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration demonstrate the need to find more efficient ways of tracing products and identifying likely sources of contamination in a timely manner," said Jerry Noland, VP of Food Safety & Quality Assurance, Albertsons Companies. "Consequently, retailers are exploring new technologies to improve the infrastructure that underpins the global food supply chain."

According to IBM, a blockchain network is strongest when it includes multiple, diverse members that form a transacting ecosystem. That is why the solution can enable an ecosystem of companies from across the food industry to onboard and share data.

Already, members are recommending or mandating that their supply chain partners, such as downstream suppliers, join the network. This is intended to bring a more complete view of the entire lifecycle of a food product.

"Establishing IBM Food Trust and opening it to the food ecosystem last year was a major milestone in making blockchain real for business," said Raj Rao, General Manager, IBM Food Trust.

"Today, we are focused on ensuring that the solution scales and is accessible to participants across the food ecosystem, such as Albertsons Companies. By bringing more members into the network and enabling them to share greater cross-sections of data in a secured environment, we believe our vision of a transformed food ecosystem using blockchain is closer than ever."