GS1 DataBar now scanning

Melanie Wishart, senior advisor – food and beverage at GS1 Australia, sheds light on GS1 DataBar, a small barcode with big benefits for the fresh produce industry.

by Matthew Jones

Can you start by telling us a little bit about GS1 and the products and services you offer?

Melanie Wishart: GS1 is a neutral, not-for-profit organisation that develops and maintains the most widely used global standards for efficient business communication.

We are best known for the barcode, named by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) as one of “the 50 things that made the world economy.”

The GS1 system enables members to uniquely identify, accurately capture and automatically share vital information about products, locations, assets and more.

With local member organisations in 122 countries, 1.5m user companies and 6bn transactions every day, GS1 standards create a common language that supports systems and processes in 25 sectors across the globe.

At GS1 Australia, we have 18,000 members and support 2i industry sectors including fresh produce.

We offer a range of services to help members expand their knowledge about GS1 standards, do more with the GS1 system, and create an efficient and effective supply chain.

You’ve recently launched DataBar, a barcode which enables products to be identified, and quickly and accurately scanned at the point-of-sale (pos) in a retail environment. Can you explain how this process works and how it differs from other ros barcodes on the market?

MW: How we identify, label, sell and capture data of loose fresh fruit and vegetables scanned at the POS is changing. This will be done with the introduction of GS1 DataBar. The GS1 DataBar is encoded with a 14-digit global trade item number (GTIN).

There is a family of seven GS1 DataBars with four applied in scanning at retail ros. These are DataBar Omnidirectional and DataBar Omnidirectional Stacked that encode a GTIN only, whereas DataBar Expanded and DataBar Expanded Stacked can encode attribute data such as use by dates, weights and batch numbers.

The current Australian implementation is for loose produce only and carries a DataBar Omnidirectional Stacked. This enables us to apply a barcode to a small product or label such as the existing price-look-up (PLU) labels applied to loose produce.

Am I right in saying DataBar is the first ros barcode GS1 has released since the European Article Number/Universal Product Code (EAN/UFC) over 40 years ago? If so, why have you seen the need for an updated version at this particular time?

MW: Yes, this is correct. DataBar has been available as an open standard GS1 barcode since 2014 and we have been working with retailers since then to enable Ros systems – both hardware and software – to be able to scan, weigh and capture produce data across their stores.

The EAN/UFC barcodes that everybody knows will never be replaced, however, they cannot encode attribute data at ros. With the introduction of DataBar Symbologies, GS1 has addressed two main needs:

Number one – smaller barcodes can be put on products that in the past were hard to barcode effectively.

Number two – barcodes that can carry more information at ros.

Can you outline some of the key benefits of DataBar for the fresh produce industry and the benefits they will provide to each link in the supply chain?

MW: The benefits of having product movement data by growers and
shippers will be advantageous for both the buying and selling community. Growers and shippers will now be able to measure the success of their products at POS versus their competitors, and thus target marketing and demographic campaigns.

Buyers will now be able to move away from commodity-based category management and toward unique product category management akin to packaged goods.

Traceability to the packhouse level gives faster and targeted recalls with the ability to stop the sale of a recalled item, providing consumers with a safer supply chain.

For retailers, globally unique company and product identification for loose fresh produce replaces today’s generic PLU information, thereby providing enhanced category management for a wider range of products. Scanning of loose produce also enables accurate, fast POS activities, which leads to better customer satisfaction, while providing improved fraud control and increased pricing accuracy.

It also promotes faster stock replenishment, leading to increased product availability.

**DataBar is being trialled and adopted by retailers across the world. Has it been taken on by any Australian retailers to date?**

MW: Australian retailers Coles and Woolworths have commenced their progressive rollouts of GS1 DataBar with Woolworths now scanning across 100 per cent of their stores. This is for loose produce only.

Packhouses and shippers consider how they would implement the barcode on a PLU label, but this is not a difficult process. Once incorporated into the artwork and printed, it is business as usual.

The response we’ve had from the retailers has been very positive, with benefits already being realised for a quicker and more accurate POS transaction.

**Is DataBar’s use limited to large-scale supermarket chains, or do you envisage smaller independents and/or greengrocers adopting this solution too?**

MW: Since the turn of the decade, all scanners have been able to scan. They just need to be activated to scan the DataBar family and be able to process the data. This is really the only disabling. As we are seeing so much stickered produce in the industry now it will be easier for other store owners to implement. As the PLU code will still exist on the label, these other greengrocers and smaller independents can still use the label.

**How are you working to extend DataBar’s reach in the Australian market?**

MW: GS1, together with PMA Australia/New Zealand and the major Australian and New Zealand grocery retailers, have met to work towards a consistent approach to the implementation of GS1 DataBar across the fresh produce industry.

The main issue was where in the supply chain the DataBar label would be applied. Retailers agreed to a workable outcome which is at the packhouse/shipper level. This was deemed to be the most practical and provides a global standardised label that can be used across multiple industries, both in Australia and across the Tasman – one label for one produce variety that everyone can use.

For many suppliers, this may not be implemented at the start of the season, due to trade through of remaining industry coded PLU labels. The message is that the suppliers should use up their existing PLU label stock first and then discuss with their trading partners which products will carry GS1 DataBar barcodes and when.

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**A small barcode with big benefits**

GS1 DataBar enables loose fresh produce to be identified and scanned at point-of-sale, instead of manually entered.