SAFETYCHAIN

SAFETYCHAIN SUCCESS STORY:
HOW A LEADING US FRUIT PACKER
BOOSTED FOOD SAFETY,
COMPLIANCE, & PRODUCTIVITY
WITH A PAPERLESS SYSTEM

For many food processors and manufacturers, using paper-based systems creates inefficiencies and frustration. Companies have far more productive initiatives than tracking down and filing paperwork. In addition, the data that's locked inside filed paper documents isn't being used to its full potential.

For Robert Peebles, Director of Employee and Food Safety for Chelan Fruit, these inefficiencies were becoming increasingly concerning. This grower-owned fruit cooperative was experiencing time and effort being wasted across multiple departments as a result of inefficient recordkeeping processes, especially with regard to its internal inspection program. Plus, management didn't have the visibility into daily operations they needed. Too much of their time was spent at their desks, without any way to keep a pulse on was going on across the facility in real-time.

It was these and other mounting challenges that drove Robert to seek a technology partner that could help them eliminate paper-heavy processes to save time and effort and improve company-wide results, as well as to keep pace with the industry's rising food safety standards.

In the coming pages, we'll detail how SafetyChain helped them achieve these goals including the reduction of inspection time for inspectors from start- to-finish by 50% or more, with firsthand input from Robert. Read on to discover the following key insights:

- ▶ The major hurdles Chelan Fruit wished to solve with technology
- ▶ Project considerations which were addressed before implementation
- ▶ The |key drivers which helped to ensure an effective rollout
- ▶ Benefits Chelan Fruit has experienced after partnering with SafetyChain
- ▶ Valuable takeaways for anyone considering a technology project

We'll start by looking at some of the software prerequisites Blue Bell had in mind.

About Chelan Fruit

As the largest apple packing co-op in the US, Chelan Fruit has multiple facilities. This 300-member, grower-owned cooperative is based in North Central Washington. In addition to apples, the company also packages, stores, and distributes cherries, pears, and plums. Some of their customers include Walmart, Safeway, Albertsons, and Sam's Club, among others.

Chelan's Fruit mission is to maximize profits to the growers through the packing and marketing of high-quality, fresh fruit. They also maintain a strong commitment to food safety, with SQF Level 3 certification for food safety and quality (the highest level available).

To help manage their food safety programs and better empower their teams to fulfill the company mission, Chelan Fruit sought to solve a few key challenges with the help of FSQA technology.

What Problems Did Chelan Fruit Want to Solve with FSQA Technology?

Robert began working with growers a decade ago, and at that time, noticed the ineffective, paper-based processes which added many extra hours to Chelan's inspection program in their warehouse. There, food safety activities were still being conducted with paperwork. The tool Chelan Fruit needed required too many robust features for the IT department to develop on its own, so Robert began the search for a solution.

One of the main challenges he sought to solve was the inefficiency resulting from heavy volumes of paperwork. Employees were spending unnecessary hours driving paperwork from facility-to-facility, and even more time was spent filing it. Time and labor were being wasted across multiple departments.

Moreover, Chelan's existing system didn't allow for visibility into their data. They'd discover issues documented in paper months later and needed a solution that would allow them to discover and act on red flag items as soon as they occurred. To support food safety and quality as well as their audit process, they knew they needed a solution that would improve data accuracy and completeness, along with better ease of access.

Plus, like many other food processing facilities, Chelan Fruit was recently impacted by a need to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). To keep pace with the industry's rising safety standards, they needed to be better organized. They didn't want their food safety personnel wasting time scrambling around trying to find pieces of paper that were missing or had become partially destroyed. Keeping these challenges in mind, Robert also had additional considerations to think about when approaching the project.

What Internal Considerations & Challenges Did Chelan Fruit Have to Address?

To prepare the group for a digital transformation, Robert and his colleagues needed a thoughtful, measured approach to selecting and implementing a paperless system. As a co-op board, there are multiple decision-makers inside their company. Robert systematically led the charge and was mindful of the fact that many steps would need to be taken before the project could launch.

For instance, he patiently and thoroughly researched software providers who offered the right solution. He took a collaborative approach by enlisting help from food safety professionals, quality control, and IT. The IT department wanted to make sure the system they chose wouldn't require a lot of oversight from them since their resources were limited.

Robert also wanted to enable Chelan's QC team to move around freely and perform their jobs away from their computers. Previously, they had been completing most of their work on paper, which kept them at their desks for long blocks of time.

To make a compelling pitch to the board, Robert highlighted the efficiencies that could be realized from the project. To justify the investment, stakeholders wanted to make sure the benefits would extend beyond food safety to impact quality and overall performance. They also wanted a system that wouldn't be a distraction or inconvenience to anyone. Based on these criteria, it was easy to find a vendor who rose to the top: SafetyChain.

Of course, while partnering with the right vendor is one aspect of successful technology implementation, there were other key drivers to success for Chelan Fruit, which we'll explore next.

What Were the Biggest Drivers of Success for the Project?

Within recent years, Chelan Fruit underwent a merger of different cooperatives. This left them with many different safety programs to manage, each requiring different information. Wisely, before implementing FSQA software, they standardized forms across facilities. This also simplified the training and onboarding for staff as they prepared to go live with their new software. Standardization prior to implementation was one key factor behind the project's success.

Chelan Fruit took the time to perfect their new forms. Now that his staff is using them everyday, he believes that employees appreciate their new, user-friendly system that enhances their workflows. Spending hours in the planning phase ultimately helped Chelan save days during implementation.

Beyond simply turning spreadsheets into forms, however, Chelan Fruit also used the project as an opportunity to challenge and think through each of their workflows. They looked for inefficiencies and processes that could be improved and used their findings during the planning and form design phase.

Additionally, Robert took a team approach and solicited input from various departments. Both the food safety warehouse representative and the sanitation manager provided input about current processes that needed improvement. Additionally, since these individuals are bilingual and most of the staff is Spanish-speaking, they were able to communicate with and represent their workers easily. The staff was excited to start getting rid of paper because lost and destroyed paperwork was an ongoing source of frustration for them. They also provided feedback about their needs and were happy to have a role in influencing decisions for the new system.

IT played a role, too, in selecting and testing hardware. They sourced affordable, Android-based tablets that were easy-to-use by both iOS and Android users. Having the right hardware is critical for putting new technology into practice, as lacking the right tools can halt the momentum.

Thanks in part to their thoughtful approach, Chelan Fruit has been able to experience a number of benefits since implementing SafetyChain.

What Benefits Has SafetyChain Created for Chelan Fruit?

As Robert explains, the purpose of investing in technology is not to simply get off paper but to strategically use the time savings to one's advantage — to increase overall performance. Here are just a few of the most noteworthy benefits he and Chelan Fruit as a whole have seen since rolling out the SafetyChain platform:

▸ **Increased Frequency & Efficiency of Plant Walkthroughs**
Previously, Chelan Fruit had paper documents for GMP and safety walkthroughs. This led to long, laborious processes, and as a result, walkthroughs were only completed twice a month at each facility. Now, walkthroughs can be broken down into smaller activities, and managers can walk one section each day or every other day. They're out on the floor much more than they had been in the past, which drives awareness and continuous improvement across their facilities. This is largely because staff no longer has to spend time trying to find one piece of paper or document – all documents are at their fingertips and are complete.

▸ **A Faster, More Meaningful Sign-Off Process**
Sign-offs on documentation have also been expedited. While the sign-off process formerly took supervisors a long time, it now can be performed quickly since the system can flag errors, allowing for immediate review and action.

▸ **Better, More Accurate Data**
The system won't allow users to skip required fields, so incomplete documentation is now a non-issue. There's no longer missing information, and the system also enforces full accountability
▸ during the sign-off process.

Improved Employee Engagement
Thanks to more walkthroughs and a streamlined system that enhances employees' routines, staff members are far more engaged now. No one has to scramble around to hunt for information. Employees' days are easier and their lives are less complicated, so improved morale is a natural byproduct of the new, paperless system.

▸ **Reduced Paperwork**
Perhaps one of the most obvious benefits of implementing SafetyChain is the reduction in paperwork. While paperwork used to take one day a week, it now only takes an hour each week.

▸ **Ability to Spot Problems Sooner**
Now, management has the ability to see what's going on in real-time. This helps to expose previously unseen problems and uncover areas for potential improvement. Plus, with increased visibility into their operational information, all decisions can be validated with actionable data. It also takes less time to spot and identify issues.

▸ **Reduced Inspection Time for Inspectors from Start to Finish by 50% or More**
It's natural for some individuals to resist change initially. Yet, because Chelan Fruit emphasized user-friendliness and took their teams' needs into consideration when planning the project, employees were using it successfully within just a few days. Now, they say that they hope the company never goes back to using paper. Of course, the project has left Chelan Fruit with some key learnings. Discover the advice they'd give to any food company pursuing a technology investment in the following section.

What Key Learnings Has Chelan Fruit Taken Away from the Project?

Every organization has different needs and expectations when it comes to technology. Nonetheless, there are a few best practices that can apply to food companies of every type and size. Here are some of the learnings that Chelan Fruit gathered from their experience:

▸ **Start small and test**
While Chelan Fruit needed to get up and running rapidly, they recommend starting small with a few forms. Focus on those first, and test them until you're satisfied. Thereafter, you can begin adding more with your learnings in mind.

▸ **Get input from all departments – even operators – to help build your business case**
Technology implementation is most effective when operators, supervisors, managers, and executives all share their input. They can help expose inefficiencies in current processes, which can then be used to create the most efficient system possible.

▸ **Choose a technology partner wisely**
The right technology partner won't try to tell you how to do your business. Instead, they'll ask questions and learn about how you operate. They should also be proactive, patient, and communicate effectively.

Summary

For Chelan Fruit, rolling out SafetyChain didn't happen overnight. It required thoughtful planning and preparation. Yet, once the pieces were in place, their staff caught on to the system quickly and the company began realizing benefits almost immediately. If you're looking to experience similar results in your organization, here are a few recommendations:

▸ **Identify your goals**
Chelan Fruit had already identified the challenges they faced when they began looking for a technology partner. This helped to ensure the perfect pairing. For them, inefficient processes caused by paper-intensive workflows, limited visibility into data, and a need to comply with evolving food safety standards were the major obstacles that needed to be addressed through technology.

Consider internal factors
▸ From getting board support to collaborating with QC and IT, there were a few key factors Chelan Fruit had to consider before pursuing their project. They needed to find a solution that wouldn't require significant IT oversight and would be able to truly deliver on its value, outside of streamlining food safety requirements alone.

Set yourself up for success
▸ Standardizing processes and forms, putting adequate time into back-end planning, and taking a collaborative approach were some of the drivers behind the project's success for Chelan. Additionally, they invested in the right hardware and took the time to identify workflows that could be improved to eliminate redundancies or inefficiencies.

Prepare to reap the benefits
▸ For Chelan Fruit, SafetyChain has delivered noteworthy benefits in terms of increased efficiency of plant walkthroughs, better data accuracy, improved employee engagement, reduced paperwork, and the ability to spot issues quickly.

Remember the three golden rules
▸ Based on their own experience, Chelan Fruit advises starting small, getting input from all departments, and choosing your technology partner wisely to ensure a successful implementation.

Although your company's pain points may not be exactly the same as Chelan's, any facility that's still using paper-based systems to manage its operations is likely to benefit significantly from a Cloud-based FSQA/QMS system. While a technology investment may seem daunting, it's certainly a better alternative to struggling with the continual challenges and inefficiencies of paperwork. And, for many companies, the benefits extend far beyond reduced paperwork alone. Everything from improved employee engagement to better audit preparedness and significant time savings can be realized with the transition to a paperless system.

About SafetyChain

SafetyChain is the #1 Plant Management Platform that improves yield, maximizes productivity, and ensures compliance for process manufacturers. Trusted by over 1,500 facilities, SafetyChain is the only enterprise solution uniting production, quality, safety, and supplier management.