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VERITAG SINGAPORE PROVIDES ANTI-COUNTERFEITING BAR CODE TAGS TO SHANGHAI NONGKEN

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By simply by swiping a bar code, one can see at a glance the "production file" of a green pepper, from its seeds, planting, fertilisers, watering, anti-pest measures, to information as exact as which worker harvested it.

Rising awareness about food safety in China has provided new opportunities for small and medium technology companies in Singapore. Singapore technology player veriTAG signed a cooperative agreement with Shanghai Nongken Agricultural Technology on Tuesday (14 October), to provide anti-counterfeiting tags for the latter's fruit and vegetable packaging bags and cartons that allow the origins of each product to be traced, using big data collection, retrieval and other high-tech approaches. Sources say that the value of the three-year contract is around RMB3 million (\$600,000).

Shanghai Nongken, which was set up in February 2012, operates a 500 mu farming site in Chongming. Through the Chongming Vegetable Farm online platform, customers can place orders before the produce is harvested. It currently delivers to more than 10,000 households.

veriTag created a "production file" tag for Nongken, with each product having a serial number and bar code. The company's CEO Jason Lim told Lianhe Zaobao that the numerous "screens" have been set up in the back-end of the system to make it more difficult for the tags to be forged.

Lim noted that companies can collect sales data through the tags on the exterior of the produce packaging and the seals of the cartons. Consumers can understand how the produce was grown and can give direct feedback on the products on the website that appears after scanning the tags. This simplifies the interaction between suppliers and consumers.

Nongken chairman Sun Xingguang said that while the tags will first be used for vegetables, they could subsequently be used in the farm's fruits, poultry and other products to raise the confidence of consumers in their quality.

He noted that the growing of fruits and vegetables is dependent on climate, season, temperature and other changes. This makes it difficult to forge the content of the tags, which can stand up to professional scrutiny. Making such information available to the public is part of the process of building credibility for the company.

Currently, Nongken cultivates between 60 and 70 types of fruits and vegetables each year. Sun said that the "production files" will help the company better understand demand for its products, such as customer orders, allowing it to tweak its produce categories to meet market needs, track the physical movement of deliveries and get information on its manpower operations. The company will be able to identify those responsible at the different parts of the production process. The information can also be used as internal training materials to improve productivity and efficiency.

Lim said that he hopes the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) can help facilitate veriTAG's entry into new markets, such as hairy crabs and estate management.