

Pilot go-ahead for hi-tech food tags

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RFID tags could be used to trace and verify the source of food items under a pilot project being run by Wolverhampton University

Wolverhampton University is running a two-year pilot project using hi-tech tags to make sure shoppers end up with safe and nutritious food.

The School of Computing and IT is to build a system using RFID (Radio-frequency Identification) tags to trace and authenticate the source of food items.

IT Futures, an initiative set up by regional development agency Advantage West Midlands' ICT Cluster, is based at the university and has built up a reputation for its expertise in and use of RFID technology.

The production and distribution of food is the largest activity for all countries across the world but there is growing concern over quality assurance and food counterfeiting such as the use of low-grade meat.

The purpose of the project, named RFID-F2F, funded by the European Commission, is to demonstrate the use of RFID at all stages of the production and sales chain, allowing products to be tracked across Europe, from the producer to the end consumer.

The RFID technology enables all the details of a food item's history to be stored on a database, including detail of the farmer, the manufacturer, the storage conditions and transportation.

Mike Musson, ICT Cluster manager, said: "There are huge potential returns on investment for RFID along the supply chain including reduced wastage, optimising logistics costs, improved quality of consumer goods and the provision of authenticated premium items.

"We aim to raise awareness among companies, in particular SMEs, of the potential ben-

efits associated with the use of RFID technology, through live implementations in the region."

Robert Newman, Professor of Computer Science at the School of Computing & IT, added: "IT Futures has been at the forefront of RFID technology for a number of years, and I'm delighted that our capabilities have been recognised by the EC for this invaluable project.

"Through the West Midlands Regional Centre for RFID, we have gained experience of tracing food and that has proved to be a decisive factor in gaining the project."

The project will involve international as well as West Midlands-based producers, processors, logistics and retail organisations. Businesses interested in participating in the project should contact: Lynsey Jones, 01902 323396.