

PETE ZIMMERMAN OF VAI: HOW WE ARE HELPING TO CREATE A RESILIENT FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

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Food loss and waste happen on every level in the supply chain from the farm to sale, and the impacts can be devastating. Waste can define product spoilage due to improper environmental controls or products reaching expiration. One solution to this is to deploy demand planning software which analyzes market data and lets processors know what's trending at any given moment. This ensures processors and retailers order products that are in demand and hold back on products that are not.

The cascading logistical problems caused by the pandemic and the war in Eastern Europe have made securing a reliable supply chain a national imperative. What must agriculture companies and policymakers do to ensure secure and resilient food supply chains? In this interview series, we are talking to business leaders who can share insights from their experiences about how we can address these challenges. As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Pete Zimmerman, North American Software Sales Manager at VAI.

Pete Zimmerman is the North American Software Sales Manager

at VAI and has over 22 years of experience working at the company.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series!

Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you.

Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?

I grew up in Poughkeepsie and I'm the youngest of four boys. It was a loud and busy household. My brothers passed down to me a love of soccer. I'm passionate about it to this day and I credit the sport for teaching me two great life skills — determination and teamwork.

Some of my fondest childhood memories were visiting my grandfather's dairy farm in Massachusetts. He taught me how to milk the cows and grow various crops, and how he got his product to market. It was that experience that piqued my interest in seeing how things got made.

I also was exposed to computers at a young age. My father worked at IBM, and ultimately so did two of my brothers. I never thought I would follow the same path, but now I am spitting out all the same acronyms (they are endless in this business) and appreciating all I have learned these past 23 years as an IBM Business Partner with VAI.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

I can't say that I have one interesting story but one of the most interesting parts of my job is getting to see how things get made — from fragrances, food products, and camera equipment used in famous movies, to soccer goals. The plant tour that I will never forget was seeing how chocolate candies are made. I was surprised how many people were involved in the process and how quickly the finished product was



ready.

You are a successful leader. Which three-character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Active listener. I make sure when I am with a prospect or customer (or anyone really) that I not only listen to what they are saying but make sure I am hearing them.

This is an important tool in helping to decipher their needs. For example, I often find there is a perceived need vs. an actual need. A prospect recently told me they needed to hire someone to track inventory but after hearing their goals I determined what they really needed was to implement some features of our enterprise software product, S2K ERP, to automate data collection.

Effective communicator. Whenever I have a conversation, I make sure I understand my audience and then speak in a clear and direct manner that is easy to understand and gets my point across. But it is more than just speaking. I do my best to be receptive and responsive to others' input. I do this in business, but it carries over to my personal life as well. My example involves my wife. She

loves sharing the story of when we were first married and I asked her how her day was, and she responded in a 5-minute rant. I looked her in the eyes and told her I needed some coaching and asked if I was just there to listen or offer advice. That day it was just to listen, but I still ask the question sometimes and get a different answer. Sometimes your role in being an effective communicator is about questing to clarify.

Perseverance. I'm very driven and I thrive on meeting goals despite obstacles. When someone tells me no, it motivates me. I have been in the industry for over 30 years, and have pursued earning a customer's business, in some cases for over 10 years!

Are you working on any exciting new projects now? How do you think that will help people?

I'm very excited about some new updates we're making to VAI's S2K MRP software application. These new features will allow manufacturers to better forecast, improve their traceability in the supply chain, and optimize their resources, which we see is helping to reshore manufacturing. Bringing more manufacturing to the U.S. certainly excites me.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

Affordable housing. I've been involved with a local nonprofit for the past 15 years that helps homeless people get back on their feet. I've seen firsthand the impact they are making by building homes people can afford. Many of the people they help are working two or three jobs and having a safe and stable place to live sets them on a path to success and breaks the cycle of homelessness.

Ok super. Thank you for all that. Let's now shift to the main focus of our interview. To ensure that we are all on the same page let's begin with some simple definitions. What does the term "supply chain" encompass?

The "supply chain" refers to a comprehensive system of people, products, and services that extends throughout the U.S. and on a global scale. It encompasses the movement of a product from its origin at the manufacturer or producer level to suppliers who then distribute the product



and deliver it to the hands of consumers.

Can you help articulate the weaknesses in our current food supply chain systems?

As a good example, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many involved in the food supply chain systems – from retailers and distributors to customers – became overwhelmed by an influx of challenges they were unprepared to handle. The number of people adopting e-commerce skyrocketed and with global ports slowing down, the existing shortcoming of the supply chain systems came to light, including a lack of flexibility, transparency, and communication between suppliers and distributors. Even in the aftermath of the pandemic, the supply chain continues to experience labor challenges and product shortages and transparency issues. As to transparency, this is what blockchain is designed to alleviate so that food can be tracked from farm to plate.

Can you help define what a nationally secure and resilient food supply chain would look like?

A nationally secure and resilient

food supply chain would need rapid detection, response, and recovery, as well as end-to-end, data-driven supply chain management. To enable transparency and visibility, the food supply chain will utilize technology such as IoT and blockchain, coupled with the ERP systems running connected to the blockchain, to quickly detect changing conditions and then rapidly adapt to and recover from that change. Planning responses utilizing data collected from the supply chain will be key.

Additionally, the pandemic revealed the dangers of having a national food system depending on capacity concentrated in a handful of geographic areas. To make the food supply chain more resilient, there needs to be a pivot towards making it more distributed and local.

Can you share with our readers a few of the things that your organization is doing to help create a more secure food supply chain?

At VAI, our S2K Food ERP software provides capabilities for compliance with food industry regulations, specifically the FDA regulations. For example, proper inventory management and

tracking are critical to comply with food safety requirements throughout the supply chain, with the goal of preventing food waste. VAI's ERP software for food was designed to meet the requirements of the food industry. In the food supply chain, VAI's software enables distributors and manufacturers to manage routes, warehouse picking, and truck deliveries in one integrated solution to maximize efficiency and performance. Many companies are hindered by manual or disconnected processes, information delays, excess inventory, and inaccurate purchasing information. S2K Food integrates and automates key processes to improve efficiencies, profitability, and customer service that are required for a more secure supply chain.

What are a few threats over the horizon that might disrupt our food supply chain that we should take action now to correct? Can you please explain?

Although things like global events, natural disasters, and labor shortages are always in play, additional food supply chain disrupters are disconnected processes and information delays. Technology that offers resiliency



and visibility across the supply chain and streamlines the entire product lifecycle will assist food suppliers in addressing these challenges. With an ERP with embedded analytics with IoT data for example, information can be tracked and visible to everyone, thereby boosting planning and transparency throughout the supply chain and allowing businesses to become more agile and better able to meet market demands.

Ok, thank you. Here is the main question of our interview. What are the “5 Things We Must Do To Create Nationally Secure And Resilient Food Supply Chains” and why?

1 . Preventing Waste

Food loss and waste happen on every level in the supply chain from the farm to sale, and the impacts can be devastating. Waste can define product spoilage due to improper environmental controls or products reaching expiration. One solution to this is to deploy demand planning software which analyzes market data and lets processors know what’s trending at any given moment. This ensures processors and retailers order products that are in demand and hold back on products that are not.

2 . Embedded technology

Businesses are continuing to move their data to the cloud coupled with embedded technology to keep organized and up-to-date solutions. Specifically in the food supply chain industry which has been using auto ID technology for quite some time but now coupled with IoT and blockchain, businesses can manage inventory and tracking to comply with food safety regulations. Companies should be processing information in real-time and sharing it with all who need access. This is particularly important to keep up with compliance and safety regulations in the food industry.

3 . Digital Transformation

Digital transformations such as mobile devices, IoT, and the growing 5G network are revolutionizing the supply chain by making picking, packing, tracking, and dispatching automated and error-free shipping. Mobile solutions can help to improve efficiencies, enhance customer service, and increase sales for businesses as they can be used at any point along the supply chain. This type of technology can help streamline information such as order processing, proof-of-delivery, route sales, warehouse management, and sales analysis.

4 . Labor shortages

Labor shortages are continuing to affect most industries, and that includes the food industry. Insufficient staffing in the supply chain can cause numerous problems such as production slowdowns, resulting in inventory stock-out for distributors and retailers. Businesses should implement ERP software solutions with automated technology – such as robotics – to mitigate labor shortages and streamline processes. ERP solutions coupled with analytics and AI can help food companies to achieve greater efficiency and visibility in the supply chain.

5 . Sustainability

Sustainability in the food supply chain focuses on meeting today’s needs and the needs of future generations while lowering the impact of food production on the natural environment. This covers materials moving through the supply chain from farm to processor to a warehouse to table. Creating sustainable touchpoints throughout the entire system will have a positive impact on the environment.

Are there other ideas or considerations that should encourage us to reimagine our food supply chain?



Digital transformation is one answer to overcoming supply chain challenges and keeping pace with consumer demand by being able to source locally or globally as needed. Utilizing data to predict future disruptors and improving visibility into the product

across the supply chain also helps to prevent and address any issues.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

For more information about VAI please visit, www.vai.net. Also,

follow us on LinkedIn at VAI, Inc.

This was very inspiring and informative. Thank you so much for the time you spent with this interview!

Thank you!



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