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## KNOW YOUR PRODUCE: Firm offers way to trace food's roots

By LANE WALLACE  
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One bin at Star Market in Salinas contained oranges priced at 99 cents a pound. A second bin had oranges at \$1.29 a pound, with a bar code and a sign that said "traceable."

The oranges came from the same grower, but nearly as many of the higher-priced fruit was sold as the 99-cent-a-pound oranges, and total sales increased.

"That's a 30 percent premium for the bin that could be traced to the grower," said John Bailey, whose Top 10 Produce company conducted a monthlong study in October. "People want to know the farmer."

Bailey presented his study, which received federal funding, Friday at the EcoFarm Conference at Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove. His ideas were developed with advice from Bob Corshen of the Community Alliance for Family Farmers in Davis.

Bailey, 42, who formed Top 10 in Salinas in June 2009, is banking on growers using his bar codes, emphasizing that his brand is transparent, allowing the consumer to trace the food all the way to the grower. Customers with smart phones can get information about the farmer in the store; there also are cards at the store with information about the farmer.

Bailey said the largest supplier of bar codes, GS1, only traces the food back to the brand. GS1 is a multi-national company based in Belgium with U.S. headquarters in New Jersey.

The Top 10 bar code costs \$280 a year; Bailey said that's far less than what GS1 is charging.

Federal law approved this month will require bar codes for produce

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John Bailey shows cards, including bar code, that are placed... (REG REGALADO/Special to The Herald)



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for farmers with more than \$500,000 in annual sales, but it doesn't require that it be traceable to the farm. The Top 10 brand is only available to independent farmers.

The study included two independent supermarkets in San Francisco, one with similar results to Star Market, the other where the higher-priced traceable oranges sold far more than the others. The cards weren't used in the study, only the word "traceable."

The Top 10 brand, Bailey said, allows independent growers to have access to wholesale markets.

The oranges used in the study were grown at Old Creek Ranch in Cayucos, 20 miles south of the Monterey County line.

Teri Blanchard, who runs the ranch with her husband, Bob, said she wasn't surprised by the study results.

"People want to know," said Blanchard, who regularly

sells at three farmers markets in Santa Cruz County.

Bailey hasn't quit his day job — he's a land-use attorney — but said Top 10 has exceeded his expectations. He has farmers signed up from 14 states and expects to have them from all 50 states by the end of this year.

While the study showed that traceable produce will increase sales, the three stores were all high-end. A second phase is planned, Bailey said, to determine if traceable produce will sell better to less-affluent customers.

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### Top 10 Produce

Top 10 Produce LLC is at 9 W. Gabilan St., Suite 1, Salinas. Phone: 888-669-2010

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