

European Flowers and Plants Industry Ready for Field Test of RFID Technology

For several months the European flowers and plants industry have been working on the implementation of a standard RFID (Radio Frequency IDentification) technology for Returnable Transport Items (RTI's). These are load carriers like flower auction trolleys, the CC Container (also known as the “Danish trolley”), and trolleys used for the distribution of mail and parcels. It is expected that the RFID technology will result in substantial time- and thus cost savings for all parties in the horticultural supply chain. A standard RFID tagging of all load carriers is set to ease the administration, and prepare the industry for future demands from major European retailers.

As a pool operator of more than 3 million CC Containers (“Danish trolleys”), Container Centralen (CC) initiated the RFID project in the horticultural industry, and is working closely with major European horticultural organisations and leading international RFID technology partners. After many tests in the labs, it is now time for the field tests. The used frequency for the RFID technology is the European standard (UHF 868 passive tag, Class 1, Generation 2), which means that the tags can be read by all readers that live up to the European standard (ETSI). For the data in the tag, the participants will follow the world wide Electronic Product Code (EPC) standard.

Refined Technology

During the field tests, a limited number of RTI's (CC Containers) will be applied with an RFID tag. When such a tagged load carrier passes an RFID gate, the RTI is automatically “recognized” by the antenna, and information about that RTI is automatically given to the computer systems.

The RFID project group and its technology partner CaptureTech have been working to improve the quality of “reads” and the read rate. Lab tests have been carried out, and the results are unusually promising: The RFID tags

on the CC Container bases are close to an unmatched 100% (99.99%) readability.

Field Test – March to June 2006

The first field test will be initiated by the RFID project group in a closed circulation at selected locations in the Netherlands by mid March 2006, and will last for three months. When the results of the field tests are positive, implementation will be initiated.

A True Win-Win Situation

In time, when implementation of the RFID technology has been completed, the customers have the possibility of using the RFID tag in their internal logistics. In this way, their ERP system “knows” which products are on which RTI, and it registers automatically which products arrived in or left the warehouse.

The benefits are cost-savings as no manual intervention is needed, less errors, and speedup of handling of incoming and outgoing goods. A neutral IT partner middleware separates the information read from the RFID tags. It is the plan that the pool operator (in this case CC) will only receive information on the movements of the RTI's between parties so that the pool operator can help the customers with efficient and automatic “balance administration” of the RTI's.

The RFID project group is working on solutions at all price levels and needs – so that it becomes possible for all users of e.g. the CC Pool System to benefit from the new technology: Readers of the RFID tags will be available as handheld devices as well as RFID gates.

As an extra benefit, RFID will also limit the level of fraud for pool items like the CC Containers. When fraud is eliminated, the overall quality of the pool will improve, and thus costs can be kept at a minimum for the honest users of the pool systems.

[Fact box]

What is RFID?

Radio frequency identification, or RFID, is a generic term for technologies that use radio waves to automatically identify people or objects.

Participating companies:

Landgard
www.nbv-uga.de

FloraHolland
www.floraholland.nl

VBA – Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer
www.vba.nl

VGB
www.vgb.nl

HBAG Bloemen en Planten
www.hbagbloemen.nl

Gasa Group A/S
www.gasagroup.com

Post Danmark A/S
www.postdanmark.dk

CC A/S
www.container-centralen.com

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