



Food Fraud Prevention: The Growing Focus on Food Document Fraud:

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Version 1

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Agenda

- Food Fraud Trends
- Document Fraud
- Food Document Fraud
- First/ next steps



Primer on Food
Document Fraud





Everything Connected to Everything

All five domains intersect — expect connections throughout.



Food Fraud Prevention: The Landscape Is Formalizing

What's driving change?

- ▶ Supply chains are going digital — data lakes, connected systems, real-time tracking
- ▶ Omnichannel operations are the new norm, multiplying touchpoints and complexity
- ▶ Automation is everywhere — ordering, approvals, compliance checks
- ▶ GFSI, ERM, and SCRM frameworks are converging around food fraud prevention

So what does this mean?

More opportunity — better visibility and traceability when designed right

More vulnerability — more entry points for fraudsters to exploit

Documents are the connective tissue of every supply chain transaction

Prevention must formalize (even more) — incremental updates to old programs are no longer enough

S U P P L Y C H A I N D I G I T A L I Z A T I O N

The Double-Edged Sword

The Promise

Complete visibility • Real-time tracking
Instant alerts • Near-perfect traceability
Digital warehouses, data lakes, farm-to-fork
connectivity

The Reality

Virtually every known food fraud incident included fake or manipulated documentation. Fraudsters aren't avoiding digital systems — they're exploiting them.

Case in Point

A supplier uploaded a Certificate of Analysis that passed every automated check — it existed, was formatted correctly, and came from an approved account.

Months later, a regulatory inquiry revealed the lab had never performed the testing.

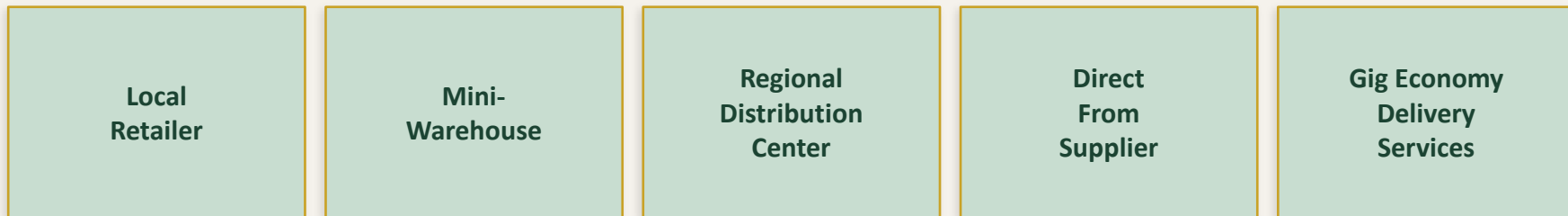
The document had been altered once, then replicated flawlessly through digital workflows.

No alarm triggered — because authenticity was never part of the control design.

Key insight: Most companies built digital infrastructure for efficiency — not security. The controls for document authenticity were never designed in.

OMNICHANNEL OPERATIONS

More Touchpoints, More Vulnerabilities



Each channel = its own documentation flow

Consistency Gap

Are documents verified the same way at every fulfillment location? With dozens of channels and partners — almost certainly not.

Informal Doesn't Scale

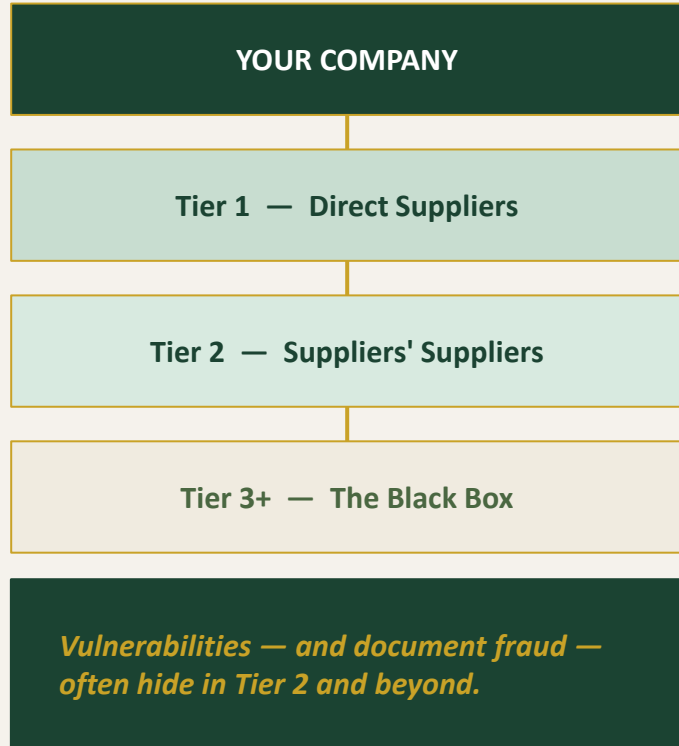
You may know your core suppliers well. But the regional distributor shipping directly to customers? Their suppliers? That's a blind spot.

Massively Open Market

- Customers can order on any platform or in person
- Customers can receive the product in any way, including delivery or pickup
- Customers and brands operate through multiple parties, including “gig economy” delivery.

S U P P L Y C H A I N M A P P I N G

Make It Formal



What Formal Supply Chain Mapping Must Identify:

- 01** All supplier tiers — not just Tier 1 direct relationships
- 02** Geographic risk factors and transportation routes
- 03** Document flows and handoff points at each tier
- 04** Where products can enter or exit controlled supply chain
- 05** Critical control points where authentication matters most

Supply chain mapping is a living system — not a one-time exercise.

Conduct a System-Wide Food Fraud Vulnerability Assessment — Again

Why your old FFVA is out of date

- Most assessments were done 2018–2020 to meet GFSI requirements
- Operating models have changed — omnichannel, digitalized workflows, new suppliers
- The fraud landscape has evolved significantly since then
- Your digital document flows weren't mapped. They need to be.

A current assessment must reflect:

- Omnichannel operations and all fulfillment channels
- Automated systems and digitalized workflows
- Document flows, handoff points, and authentication gaps
- Indirect suppliers — Tier 2, 3, and beyond

Defining Food Document Fraud

Types, Formats, Functions & Information

An Ongoing, Multi-Year Research Project

John W. Spink | Michigan State University (MSU)

Food Fraud Prevention Expert

Roy Fenoff | The Citadel University

Criminology Department Professor • Certified Document Examiner

All Food Fraud Has Fraudulent Documents

No Consistent Definitions

Key terms like 'document fraud,' 'food document,' and related concepts lack formal, shared definitions across agencies and standards bodies.

No Organizing Framework

Without a typology of food document types, practitioners cannot systematically assess risk, detect fraud, or target countermeasures.

A Critical Gap in Standards

ISO, FDA, EU, and GFSI standards address altered or forged documents — but none address documents that were never created (phantom documents).

Food Document Fraud

"Intentional deception for economic gain by misrepresenting information in a document or the document itself, that is related to food products or related commercial activities."

— ISO-Based Summary Definition (Spink & Fenoff, 2025/2026)

I N T E N T

Intentional

Purposeful misrepresentation —
not clerical error or omission

G A I N

Economic Gain

Financial motive distinguishes
fraud from negligence or mistake

D O C

The Document

Fraud operates through the
document as a mechanism — false
claims enter the supply chain as if
legitimate

Five Types — Each a Distinct Fraud Vulnerability

Physical

Analog / Paper

Material document (paper, card).
Readable without digital equipment.
E.g., a signed certificate of analysis.

Digital

Electronic / Born-Digital

Computer file — born-digital or digitized from physical. Never required to exist in paper form.

Hybrid

Dual-Format Official

Exists in BOTH physical and digital forms. Either format independently constitutes the official record.

Multi-Factor

Combined Required

Physical AND digital components BOTH required to complete the transaction. Neither alone is sufficient.

Phantom

⚠ Never Created

Referenced or claimed in communications but DOES NOT EXIST in any physical or digital form. A critical gap in current standards.

Integrating Food Document Fraud into Your Prevention Program

1

Formalize the Step

Add Food Document Fraud as an explicit category in your food fraud vulnerability assessment (FFVA). Map document types at each supply chain touchpoint.

2

Train Your Team

Educate buyers, QA, and compliance staff on the five document format types — including phantom documents. Integrate into onboarding and annual refreshers.

3

Update Expertise

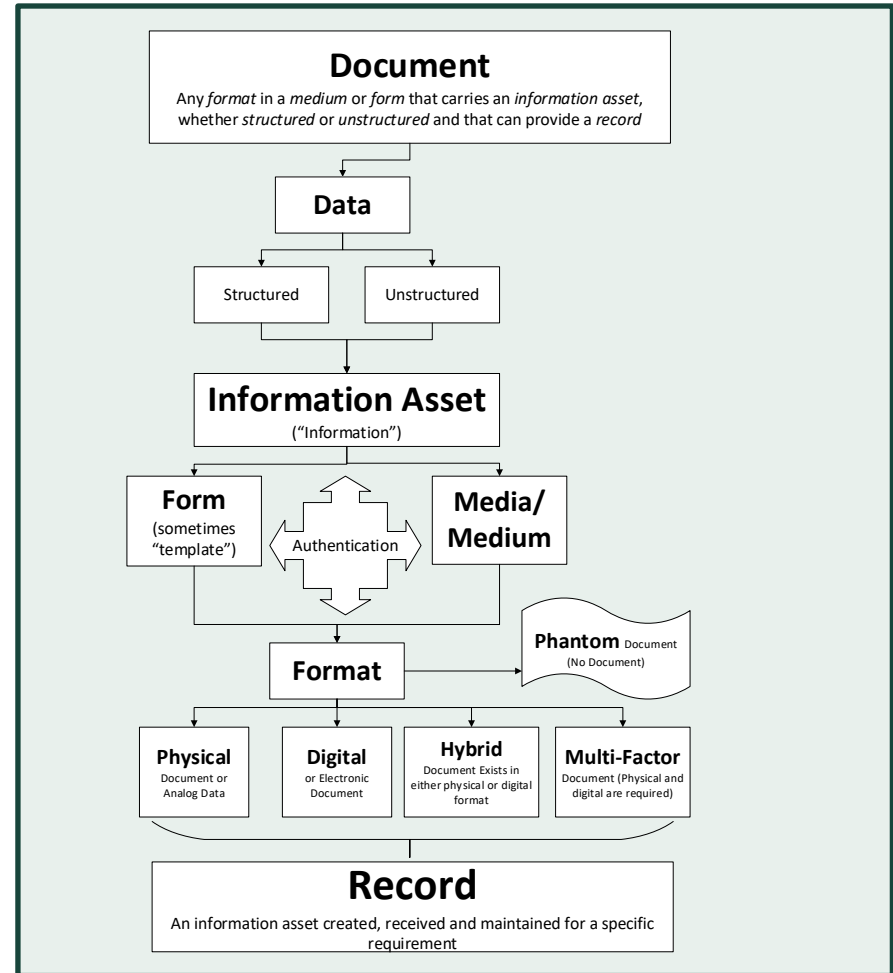
Develop or source subject-matter expertise in document examination. Update audit protocols and supplier approval processes to include document fraud controls.

4

Build Verification Systems

Establish independent verification for high-risk documents (COAs, COOs, COCs). Do not accept claimed documentation without confirmation of existence.

Relationship Hierarchy for Data, Information, Documents & Records



The Collaborative Ecosystem: Connecting Stakeholders for Food Fraud Prevention

The Four Pillars of the Prevention Network

Academia & Industry Collaboration



Researchers define typologies while industry specialists implement practical, real-world supply chain controls.

Regulators & Associations



Government bodies and professional groups establish the legal liability and global oversight standards.

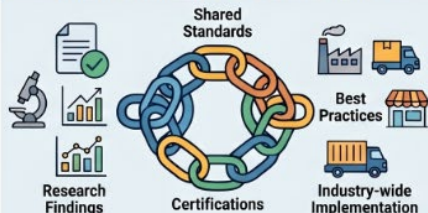
Everything Connected to Everything



Prevention is a holistic system where no entity operates in a vacuum.

The Intertwined Connection Process

Shared Standards & Certifications



These act as the primary links connecting research findings to industry-wide implementation.

The Prevention Cycle



An ongoing loop of validation and updates between all four stakeholder groups.

Unified Consensus



Establishing a common language and terminology is the final step toward global prevention.

Food Document Fraud: What to Do Now

- 1 Every food fraud event involves fraudulent documents — document fraud is the mechanism, not a side issue.
- 2 Five document format types exist: Physical, Digital, Hybrid, Multi-Factor, and Phantom — each with distinct fraud vulnerabilities.
- 3 Phantom documents (never-created, only claimed) represent a critical gap not yet addressed in ISO, FDA, EU, or GFSI standards.
- 4 Organizations should add Food Document Fraud as a formal step in vulnerability assessments and update training accordingly.
- 5 This is an active, multi-year research initiative — definitions and frameworks will continue to evolve.

It All Comes Together

Consensus on Terminology — and Each of Our Roles in Prevention

Industry	Academia	Associations	Regulators	Standards & Certifications
Implement controls, verify documents, report incidents.	Define terms and build the evidence base.	Connect practitioners and disseminate standards.	Enforce requirements and mandate independent verification.	Formalize definitions, create protocols, close the gaps.

The common ground: shared language enables shared action — across every sector, in every supply chain.

DISCUSSION

Questions • Comments • Collaboration



Check your documents!!!

Resources & Contact

Free Training (MOOCs):
foodfraudpreventionthinktank.com

Research & Publications:
www.FoodFraudPrevention.com



Supplemental References

- Spink, John W (2019). *Food Fraud Prevention – Introduction, Implementation, and Management*, Food Microbiology and Food Safety series, Springer Publishing, New York,
- Spink, John W. & Fenoff, Roy. *Defining Food Document Fraud, Including Types, Formats, Functions, and Information*. Working Paper, April 2026.
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- Spink, John W. *Primer on Food Document Fraud: Defining Food Document Fraud — Data, Information, Form, Format, Medium, Type, and Record*. Food Fraud Prevention Academy, www.FoodFraudPrevention.com, December 2025.