

A Softchoice Case Study

Gay Lea Foods modernizes its environment with Softchoice-guided migration



Overview

Industry

Dairy products in Canada.

Business challenges

Outdated on-prem environments and a small internal IT team, both trying to support a growing business.

Technology and service solutions deployed

Microsoft 365, Microsoft Azure, Softchoice Adoption Services, Softchoice Keystone end-user support.



Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Limited (“Gay Lea Foods”) is a Canadian dairy co-operative, with members on approximately 1,400 dairy farms in Ontario and Manitoba and is known for its dedication to high-quality, innovative dairy products. Gay Lea Foods has multiple processing plants, distribution centres and offices throughout Ontario.

In 2017, Gay Lea Foods reached a tipping point in how it was managing its IT infrastructure and services. The company had been reliant on an aging set of technologies that was beginning to fail. Moreover, these IT assets and Gay Lea Foods’ relatively small IT team could not support the company’s ongoing growth.

Digital transformation became crucial in this context. Gay Lea Foods sought to make IT a more reliable enabler of the organization’s business, instead of a cost center held back by outdated tech. The next major step for Gay Lea Foods was to pursue a fresh strategy in the cloud, with the support and guidance of Softchoice. Subsequently, Softchoice guided both Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Azure migrations, while also providing professional services and help desk assistance.

Escaping the limitations of on-premises IT to support growth



“Instead of looking at how we could do everything ourselves, we wanted to extend our capabilities and modernize through a collaborative partnership. Softchoice came in at the ground floor to work with us on our cloud ambitions.”

— Oighrig McLoughlin, Manager of IT Services at Gay Lea Foods

Before partnering with Softchoice on this project, Gay Lea Foods faced multiple issues with its existing on-premises IT environments.

Many of its key applications were approaching end of life. Likewise, some of its hardware was also becoming more challenging to maintain. For example, there was a legacy Microsoft Exchange environment that was onerous for the talented, but relatively small, Gay Lea Foods IT team to keep on supporting. Applying patches, monitoring resource consumption and related tasks were increasingly difficult.

Gay Lea Foods had only three people working on its on-prem IT infrastructure footprint, along with a few more personnel on the desktop support side. The combination of a tiny technical team and an old patchwork of infrastructure applications put Gay Lea Foods’ operations under significant pressure as it grew rapidly.

The company had doubled in size over the previous eight years, primarily through acquisitions. Only a cloud migration could provide the scalability and flexibility suited to Gay Lea Foods’ expanding needs, and also ensure it could decrease its reliance on the infrastructure at its headquarters.

“To future-proof our business operations, we needed more IT resources and bandwidth than we had available to us in-house,” explained Oighrig McLoughlin, Manager of IT Services at Gay Lea Foods. “Instead of looking at how we could do everything ourselves, we wanted to extend our capabilities and modernize through a collaborative partnership. Softchoice came in at the ground floor to work with us on our cloud ambitions.”

The Gay Lea Foods-Softchoice partnership: Journey toward the cloud

After McLoughlin persuaded Gay Lea Foods' leadership to approve a shift in IT strategy, Gay Lea Foods and Softchoice collaborated closely on a series of migrations.

Gay Lea Foods was already licensed for Microsoft 365, and accordingly, it decided to move to that environment first for its company email, with expert help from Softchoice professional services. The Softchoice Adoption Services team provided extensive support and training to make sure that Gay Lea Foods' teams and users were well-equipped to get the most from their new cloud-based collaboration tools.

The success of this migration had a snowball effect on the rest of Gay Lea Foods' plans. Beyond email, it also migrated other key business applications, including Sharepoint Online, into the cloud by working with Softchoice. The co-operative shifted almost 100 of its servers into Azure, too.

Softchoice was also enlisted as a service desk provider. Doing so would take the burden off of the small internal Gay Lea Foods team and deliver the best possible user experience, at scale, to Gay Lea Foods' business.

As a result of the Softchoice partnership, Gay Lea Foods now hosts all of its critical applications and services in the cloud. Gay Lea Foods' operations are on much better long-term footing following the cloud migration, with increased flexibility, security and redundancy to support its growth across Canada.



A more flexible, secure and redundant environment for Gay Lea Foods

“Because all of our apps were newly cloud-based, our knowledge workers could keep going without interruption even after they went home, using our VPN services. The timing was impeccable.”

— Oighrig McLoughlin,
Manager of IT Services at Gay Lea Foods



The cloud migration also came at an opportune time, right before the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote work.

“We were fortunate, working with Softchoice, to have completed the entire transition beforehand,” explained McLoughlin. “Because all of our apps were newly cloud-based, our knowledge workers could keep going without interruption even after they went home, using our VPN services. The timing was impeccable.”

Moreover, activities such as spinning up new servers to meet demand are much more straightforward now. Patching is greatly simplified, as is resource tracking. The Gay Lea Foods team can see how much they are spending and what resources their cloud applications are consuming. In turn, this information helps with budgeting.

Softchoice’s Keystone end-user support services have also become an extension of Gay Lea Foods’ team, providing top-notch assistance as the company grows.

“Softchoice’s professional services and its help desk solutions have been excellent at every step,” stated McLoughlin.

Overall, Gay Lea Foods saw the project as a true collaboration between its internal teams and Softchoice.

About Gay Lea Foods



The customer

Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Limited is a Canadian-owned co-operative that produces and sells a variety of dairy products such as butter, cheese, sour cream and whipped cream with members on roughly 1,400 dairy farms in Ontario and Manitoba, and more than 4,100 producer and investor shareholders.

The ask

As it grew, Gay Lea Foods was running up against the limitations of its aging on-prem IT environments. It needed to move its critical applications and services into the cloud for better scalability and flexibility. It also sought to modernize its help desk.

The Softchoice value

Softchoice oversaw a Microsoft 365 and Azure migration for Gay Lea Foods, training users on new collaboration tools and workflows. It also extended the Gay Lea Foods help desk so that the co-operative's processing plants, distribution centres and offices got the most reliable support.