



# Building a Competitive Co-operative

Gay Lea Foods empowers farm members to lead with help from online learning

*To coordinate an extensive network of dairy farmers and processing facilities, the Gay Lea Foods dairy co-operative relies on its highly skilled and motivated members to make the right decisions when they're elected as delegates or Directors to its board. To nurture talent, Gay Lea Foods is helping Directors and delegates develop their skills with online training courses powered by D2L.*

## Company

Gay Lea Foods is a leader in the Canadian dairy industry and the largest dairy co-operative in Ontario. Dedicated to innovation, the development of high-quality products, and growing the market for Canadian milk, Gay Lea Foods is 100 percent Canadian-owned, with members on more than 1,400 dairy farms in Ontario and Manitoba, and more than 4,320 producer and investor shareholders.

### AT A GLANCE

**Client:** Gay Lea Foods

Co-operative Limited

**Directors:** 11

**Zone delegates:** 60, plus two

Delegate Observers from Manitoba

**Employees:** 1000+

**Industry:** Food & Beverage

Manufacturing

**Website:** [GayLea.com](http://GayLea.com)

### CHALLENGE

- Strengthen Gay Lea Foods' competitive edge
- Continue to provide and lead learning and development opportunities for elected representatives in smarter, more effective ways
- Support continuous learning throughout the co-operative

### SOLUTION

- Learning & Creative Services
- Intelligent Agents
- Quizzes
- Gamification

### RESULT

- Directors and delegates are empowered to enhance their skills and knowledge, enabling them to identify and seize new development opportunities
- Dairy producer members of the co-operative see the value of seeking governance roles with Gay Lea Foods
- Average 90 percent pass rate on pretest quizzes



# The Challenge

## **BUILDING ON THE SUCCESS OF TRADITIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FORMATS**

To empower its elected Directors and delegates to enhance their skills, Gay Lea Foods is on a mission to place continuous learning at the heart of its co-operative's culture.

Quintin Fox, Director of Training Development & Capacity Resourcing at Gay Lea Foods, explains:

“Gay Lea Foods has a well-earned reputation for delivering world-class training and development programs for our employees, delegates and Directors over the years. We wanted to raise our training and development programs to a new level by leveraging content and experiences digitally. We continue to deliver programs traditionally, to great success, and have now raised the bar by developing our online Knowledge Hub.”

Rob Goodwill, chair of the board, outlines how online training has helped make the co-operative more agile and effective: “[Previously], when a new Director or delegate was elected, it would take us up to a year to provide them with the in-person training they required to feel confident and play an active role in decision-making.”

## **IMAGINING A SMARTER WAY TO LEARN**

To accelerate Director and delegate development across the co-operative, and build on the success of the existing Leadership in Governance training and development programs, Gay Lea Foods began exploring the option of an online learning platform. A recommendation from one of its partner organizations led Gay Lea Foods to D2L.

“We recognized that an online learning platform offered the potential to streamline knowledge transfer and skill development across our organization, helping us move to a continuous training model,” says Fox. By implementing online Director and delegate training with D2L, Gay Lea Foods aimed to help their newly elected representatives get up to speed fast and enable them to make more meaningful contributions to support business growth from day one in their new role.

Michael Barrett, President & CEO at Gay Lea Foods, elaborates: “We believe in lifelong learning at Gay Lea Foods, which means helping each of our Directors and delegates enhance their skills and thrive. That's the only way we can ensure that our co-operative is equipped to grow and develop for the benefit of our customers, our members, and the broader community.”

**With the support and creative direction of D2L,  
Gay Lea Foods built a series of interactive courses designed  
to make learning as fun and intuitive as possible.**

## The Solution

### **EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE IN EDUCATION**

Gay Lea Foods worked with D2L to facilitate continuous, easy-to-access learning and development opportunities for its elected representatives.

“We were really impressed with D2L,” says Goodwill. “They had the expertise to help us create what we envisioned, but also the experience to give new users all the help and assistance they need.”

This was especially important for Gay Lea Foods, because some of its delegates were not regular users of digital technology. Working with D2L, they were able to ensure that the courses were easy to navigate, and delegates were able to participate even in rural areas with limited bandwidth.

### **BUILDING INTERACTIVE TRAINING COURSES**

Working closely with the Learning and Creative Services team at D2L, Gay Lea Foods has developed eight courses to-date covering a wide variety of topics, including sessions on each aspect of board governance and membership, as well as courses that provide Directors and delegates with insight into the structure of other co-operatives around the world. Fox says, “The learning and creative services team was instrumental in helping build a series of truly

engaging online training courses, providing us with a development space where we could take risks and incorporate nontraditional styles of learning into each module.”

### **ENGAGING LEARNERS WITH GAMIFICATION**

With the support and creative direction of D2L, Gay Lea Foods built a series of interactive courses designed to make learning as fun and intuitive as possible. For instance, it structured its online training courses around a fictional dairy co-operative called Dombridge Dairy Farmers, which is populated with avatars representing dairy executives and board members.

Fox explains: “D2L really helped us utilize the power of gamification to bring learning to life and create engaging, teachable moments across the modules. Our learners can explore new concepts via interactions with characters within the fictional dairy co-operative. For instance, in one module, the CFO avatar instructs learners about the ratios of a successful company and outlines how these ratios impact the fictional co-operative.”



By interacting with avatars in the Dombridge Dairy Farmers learning environment, Gay Lea Foods' learners can experience a realistic simulation of the actual scenarios they could experience in their role as a Director.

"The games are a lot of fun, but they also open delegates' eyes to the fact that Gay Lea Foods faces many of the same challenges as the Dombridge Dairy Farmers co-operative—challenges that might not otherwise have occurred to them, which we think is a valuable lesson," adds Fox.

### INCORPORATING INTELLIGENT DESIGN

To encourage learners to focus on their development and track their progress, Gay Lea Foods has incorporated smart messaging features into its training modules.

"We are really seeing learners apply themselves to their courses," says Fox. "D2L's intelligent agents track a learner's progress and their use of the tools in the course, then send them gentle reminders to start a new module or pick up where they left off."

D2L also helped Gay Lea Foods incorporate a wide range of quizzes at various stages in their modules, including multiple choice quizzes and drag-and-drop quizzes.

"It's a great way for us to measure progress, because if participants reach the 60 percent pass mark, we know that they've got a good grasp of the concepts we're trying to teach," says Goodwill.

He adds: "Many of our learners have commented on how much they enjoyed the quizzes and how they have helped them solidify their knowledge, while also making the learning process much more fun. There's also an element of friendly competition. We found that many of them were comparing their marks with one another, motivating each other to improve."



## The Results

With a wide range of online training courses now available, Gay Lea Foods enables its elected representatives to enhance their skills and seize new opportunities for the co-operative.

### FROM DAIRY FARMER TO DIRECTOR

Jennifer Woodhouse has been a dairy farmer since the early 1990's and was elected as a delegate of Gay Lea Foods in 2004. After taking part in the co-operative's 18-month Advanced Leadership in Governance program, she recently became a Director.

"Knowing that Gay Lea Foods would provide me with comprehensive training on all aspects of directorship inspired me to take on the role," says Woodhouse. "I enjoyed the convenience of this course; I could study each module at a time that best suited me and even pause a module and finish it later if I needed to. I also liked the interactivity of the D2L learning environment, which makes training enjoyable and intuitive."

By working with D2L to offer structured, effective, and convenient training schemes, Gay Lea Foods continues to help its elected Directors and delegates "upskill" while proving to its membership that working with the co-operative is also an opportunity to learn and develop.

"The D2L online courses really help people develop skills quickly—we have seen a 90 percent pass rate on many of the pretest quizzes in each module," says Barrett.

### PREPARED TO SUCCEED

By placing continuous learning at the heart of its organization, Gay Lea Foods has increased the overall agility of its business, enabling the co-operative to keep competitors at bay and strengthening its leading position in the Canadian dairy market.

"As word spreads inside and outside our business about the excellent training programs available, we are seeing more members seeking election for a delegate position," says Fox. "This goes to show that offering people the chance to advance their skills continually really helps drive engagement and enthusiasm for our goal—to deliver lifelong learning for all our Directors and delegates."

Goodwill concludes: "This year, we were honored to win the Co-operative and Mutuals Canada's Large Co-operative of the Year award, which proves that all the hard work we have put into developing strong leadership and effective training is really paying off. D2L is helping our people build a co-operative that will be even stronger in the future."