

FOREMOST FARMS

Foremost Farms USA moves to LABVANTAGE for a Centralized Data Collection and Reporting System

Company Background



Foremost Farms is a dairy cooperative owned by approximately 4,400 dairy farmers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The cooperative's 26 manufacturing plants make packaged fluid milk; chilled, ready-to-serve juices; cheese; sour cream; butter and a host of value-added whey ingredients. The cooperative has 25 laboratories testing milk, cheese and food ingredients.

Key Challenges

The Foremost Farms laboratories each had developed their own methods for data collection and storage. There were two basic data collection needs which had to be addressed -- the data which is analyzed for their patrons (the cooperative farmers) and regulatory agencies as well as the data from the ingredients manufacturing processes. The patron milk sample data was being collected and managed by a set of distributed systems, the ingredients laboratories were using an Excel spreadsheet approach. The result of this was a large amount of data existing in separate systems, which could not be easily tracked or searched. It was decided that a standard LIMS should be implemented to meet everyone's needs. The company was willing to commit the necessary IT and laboratory resources to the project development and long term support, however it desired a user-managed system, which was easy-to-use from a laboratory technician's standpoint, and configurable by the users with regard to setting up screens and queries once it was installed. In essence, they did not wish to permanently assign an IT person to the laboratory to support the system, but preferred to support the LIMS as they would any other large corporate database.

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System Sought

The company studied their needs and determined that they needed a LIMS solution that could solve the following problems:

- Standardization of testing procedures and forms across the company.
- Better products tracking to yield:
- Quick and accurate test results comparisons to specifications.
- Lot analysis and customer specification checking to determine the appropriate customer for the product.
- Creation of information packages by marketing and the technical departments for customers.

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- Report creation for internal distribution and government reporting to different states and the USDA.
- Deployment to all locations from a single database server.
- Access to the data from anywhere on the corporate intranet.
- Limiting access to data by individual and by role.
- Instrument interfacing.
- Configurability and support by laboratory personnel. The company formed a task force to determine the needs of the laboratories and select a company-wide vendor.

System Selected

Seven LIMS vendors were initially identified and the final choice was LABVANTAGE. This decision was made because of the out-of-the-box functionality and the configurability inherent in LABVANTAGE. In addition, the size of the company and the level of support that a company of LABVANTAGE's size could deliver, were key factors in the decision.

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System Delivered

The system has been implemented in 25 laboratories. It handles the majority of the data collection needs at the seven ingredients laboratories; the other locations are using the system for tracing data going to/from central lab locations, milk testing for the cheese plants and patron herd testing. LABVANTAGE handles about 300 samples per day for the ingredients laboratory and another 1200 samples for the central laboratories. In addition another 3,000 patron milk samples are interfaced to the patron payment system each day. The current implementation of LIMS has approximately 50 instruments interfaced to it including:

- pH meters
- Analytical balances from several different manufacturers
- Foss/Milko Scan (an infrared milk testing instrument)
- Aquastar Moisture analyzers
- LECO Protein Analyzers

In addition, they have used the Aironet radio link system, which allows the laboratory personnel to collect data on mobile laptops, which load the data directly into the LIMS via the radio link. The data is therefore contained in the laboratory and patron payment systems rather than distributed across the multitude of systems that existed previously. Foremost Farms personnel now know exactly where to search and look for desired data selections.

The database is housed on a server located at the corporate headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and data from any laboratory is available throughout the corporate network once it has been entered into LABVANTAGE. The LABVANTAGE application is also driven from the headquarters site and uses a Citrix (Metaframe) server pool running on 14 dual processor systems. This allows the Corporate IT staff to support the application and database from a central location and since the application code is located on the Citrix Server boxes, there is no need to go to the laboratories for system installations and upgrades.

Return On Investment

With the implementation of a standardized system, Foremost has found that the productivity of its laboratories has increased, allowing laboratory personnel to redirect their efforts from data management to science. In addition, because of the standardization, IT has found that they can now focus their efforts on other value-added activities, which can be leveraged across the 25 laboratories.

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