

TYPE
CASE STUDYINDUSTRY
FOOD & BEVERAGELOCATION
NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

ALL-HANDS-ON-DECK ENSURE SUCCESSFUL PLEX IMPLEMENTATION FOR HARVEST FOOD GROUP, INCREASING ACCURACY AND PRODUCTION INSIGHTS

Harvest Food Group (HFG) is a family-owned business based in Naperville, Illinois. The company leads the food and beverage industry in individually-quick-frozen (IQF) foods, supplying quality fruits, vegetables, grains and more across the globe. With a manufacturing plant based in Chicago, Illinois, HFG also serves as a collaborative co-packing solution and produces private label products for grocers. Additionally, the company created a retail line called Path of Life, which specializes in high quality, frozen side dishes made with clean and simple ingredients.

RESULTS



Cycle counts accuracy
increased from **6% to 98%**



Accounts receivable aging
decreased from **5% to 1.6%**



Eliminated manual
inventory checks



OVERCOMING PRODUCTION OBSTACLES

Harvest Food Group was founded in 1999 by father and son duo, Philip and Jason Eckert, with only two telephones and a dial-up modem. Over the years, HFG has evolved into a leading manufacturer in the food and beverage industry as it strives to create products with clean and thoughtfully sourced ingredients from growers across the world. As the Harvest Food Group portfolio grew to encompass family-owned start-ups to international suppliers and everything in between, the company recognized a gap in its existing, paper-based system. While this framework tracked items produced and the business finances, it was otherwise limited in its capabilities.

One significant issue stood out: the old system required manual confirmation of invoices on the final day of each month. Consequently, the team needed to run all reports the night prior to a

new month, forcing Harvest Food Group to halt production as they carried out this tedious process. In instances where production began too soon, reporting started over from the beginning. This timeframe also required employees in finance to stay at the facility until late to ensure invoice completion. This system was not only demanding for the team, but also a strain on business.

With so few records housed in their current system, recalls and instances that required historical information left employees scattered, searching through boxes of paper files. Harvest Food Group also had zero plant floor visibility, so while they could see when production lines were running, additional details were scarce. There were also significant gaps in data due to manually recorded downtime—this lack of visibility and digitization made Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) a mere pipedream for the Harvest Food Group team.



COMPANY ALIGNMENT FOR A SMOOTH GO-LIVE

Due to an overall lack of accountability and data integrity coupled with the desire for a more advanced system that could grow with them as business evolved, Harvest Food Group decided to implement Plex ERP and Plex MES. The original system could no longer meet the company's growing needs, so the HFG team had high hopes for Plex's ability to not only fill in the existing gaps, but also to drive business forward with additional improvements.

As the implementation began, Harvest Food Group worked alongside a Plex project manager to stay on track. All employees were granted access to the Plex training environment, which gave them step-by-step implementation instructions. The team also utilized a Gantt chart that illustrated the 16-phase go-live

process in detail, broken down both by department and module within Plex. These assets provided a comprehensive view of the expectations and guidelines needed to successfully implement Plex.

Harvest Food Group's initial go-live date was pushed by five months to ensure that the team was well-versed and fully comfortable in Plex before completing the process. Different team members became directly involved as each module was implemented, testing operations and ensuring data accuracy before moving on to the next step in the process. This allowed for a thorough understanding of Plex through each phase of the implementation, solidifying the decision to go-live later than initially planned. Harvest Food Group successfully went live with Plex in August of 2018 and even opted to turn off access to the old system upon completion of the implementation, ensuring that all employees were fully on Plex.



One of the nice things, which was a surprising result for me was people's motivation to want to continue to improve. Plex had a huge impact on the work done here and how it was done, and it opened people's eyes to how fast things could be achieved.



JENNY CRIMMINS

Senior Business Systems Analyst
Harvest Food Group

COLLABORATIVE COMPANY SUCCESS

Harvest Food Group has seen significant improvements since implementing Plex. The most pressing issues were production shutdowns, which occurred once a month for manual invoices and an additional one week per year for full inventory counts. Since implementing Plex, Harvest Food Group has not experienced any halts in production to complete these processes. Accounts Receivable (AR) aging has also decreased from 5% to 1.6%, indicating that the company is now able to collect receivables more efficiently. With Plex, HFG now has historical data and real-time production information, allowing the team to be

flexible and on top of any shortages or overages. Additionally, Harvest Food Group has seen cycle count accuracy increase from 6% to 98%, which has drastically improved inventory management and helped to decrease manual labor.

Initially, employees were hesitant to trust Plex given the unreliable data provided by the previous system. Over time, this distrust has been alleviated thanks to increased traceability and real-time data in Plex. The team can now see immediate results and have become better aligned with the shared goal of finding new solutions as Harvest Food Group continues to improve scrap and OEE digitalization.



Before Plex we were limited in the ways we could analyze our data, pull our records and strive for improvements. Now, with Plex, we're able to continuously look for ways to improve our business, our bottom-line, data accuracy and are constantly improving the ways in which we work.



JENNY CRIMMINS

Senior Business Systems Analyst
Harvest Food Group

Looking ahead, Harvest Food Group is excited for the future with Plex in their corner. Currently, the team is in the process of implementing Plex Quality Management System (QMS), which will assist in the digitization of checklists and ultimately

lead to expedited product handling at HFG. Harvest Food Group has exceeded their initial implementation goals and is committed to finding new ways to improve through Plex every day.

ABOUT PLEX

Plex, by Rockwell Automation, is a leader in cloud-delivered smart manufacturing solutions, empowering the world's manufacturers to make awesome products. Our platform gives manufacturers the ability to connect, automate, track, and analyze every aspect of their business to drive transformation. The Plex Smart Manufacturing Platform™ includes

solutions for manufacturing execution (MES), ERP, quality, supply chain planning and management, asset performance management, production monitoring, process automation and analytics to connect people, systems, machines and supply chains, enabling them to lead with precision, efficiency and agility. To learn more, visit www.plex.com