



Major Milk Cooperative Automates Form Processing and Ensures Business Continuity with ABBYY

Michigan Milk Producers Association sells 4.5 billion pounds of milk on behalf of 1,200 farms every year. This generates 75,000 hand printed forms per annum. Their information required manual entry into a database by highly specialized data clerks – a task ABBYY FlexiCapture® now handles accurately and automatically.

“ABBYY FlexiCapture allowed us to implement business rules that we really couldn’t have otherwise.”

Greg Shulkey, Director of MIS, Michigan Milk Producers Association



About Michigan Milk Producers Association

In 1916 a group of Michigan dairy farmers established what would become a model for their industry: Michigan Milk Producers Association, a dairy cooperative dedicated to marketing its members' milk to their greatest advantage possible. Today, the association represents 1,900 members, and is the United States' eleventh largest dairy cooperative.

Learn more at www.mimilk.com

Run by dairy farmers, for dairy farmers

Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA) exists to serve its members: dairy farmers who rely on it to maintain a stable, reliable market for selling their milk at a fair price. Founded in 1916, MMPA now has 1,900 owner members, representing 1,200 farms in the states of Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin. “We focus 100% on our owners, who are all independent farmers,” says Greg Shulkey, Director of MIS, MMPA. “As a cooperative, our job is not only to get them a fair price for their milk, but to take care of all the details in getting it to market and getting them paid.”

And the details involved in marketing milk are complex. It involves receiving, transporting, storing and testing the milk according to strict Federal regulations – as well as paying the haulers who truck the farmers' milk. All of which generates a tremendous amount of data that is vital for accounting purposes, quality control and regulatory compliance. “We do a tremendous amount of work for our owners on the backend,” Shulkey says. “Records have to be available for our farmers, customers and Federal audit.”

Manual input: A danger to business continuity

MMPA markets 4.5 billion pounds of milk a year, generating 75,000 weight sheets in the process. These hand printed forms track the progress of milk from farmers to their customers – who range from bottlers and cheese makers to frozen yogurt makers. “Weight sheets are filled in by haulers,” explains Shulkey. “A hauler may visit up to 10 farms, filling in a section on his weight sheet for each. Information includes pick up times, pounds of milk from each farmer and time of delivery to customers.”

And for 20 years, MMPA has relied on data clerks to manually enter the weight sheets' information into its database. Which, explains Shulkey, puts business continuity at risk – but not because of the usual problems associated with manual data entry: “Our clerks are top notch, their speed and accuracy excellent. But their skills are highly specialized and geared to our specific needs. Bringing just one replacement up to speed could take six months – we just don't see data clerks like we used to. And this is very risky since we take in 300 forms a day. We needed to automate and simplify the process.”

Powering a solution with ABBYY FlexiCapture

The solution Shulkey envisioned would let anyone capture and enter data simply by scanning the weight sheets. And since Federal law demands that the sheets be stored for two years, MMPA also wanted PDFs created for digital archiving. Yet, while it was clear automated form capture was key, finding the right fit took time. But after extensive research Shulkey says, “ABBYY FlexiCapture stood out.”

To help with implementation, MMPA engaged UFC Inc., an ABBYY partner. And as UFC's General Manager, Travis Spangler, explains, FlexiCapture's accuracy and flexibility were vital to the project's success: “Those hand printed weight sheets aren't always so legible. MMPA also wanted to assign QR stickers to them. And we needed to accommodate custom assemblies for calling data from the database for validation. FlexiCapture was easily up to all that.”

Working with UFC, MMPA began integrating FlexiCapture with their SQL database – an application that itself had been converted over from the cooperative's in-house designed mainframe solution the previous year. “The need to handle barcodes, backend data checking and hand printing meant we needed flexibility,” says Shulkey. “But generating a DLL and moving it into production was too cumbersome to do on the fly. So we wrote the DLL to start procedures on the back end, passed data back and forth to see what worked, and FlexiCapture supported the dynamic. If we missed things and needed new business rules, we just added them.”

Within a month of engaging with UFC, Shulkey and his team staged a rollout of its new solution. “The hauler,” explains Shulkey, “puts a QR sticker unique to each farm and trip on that farm's section of the weight sheet. He then places a matching sticker on a vial of milk that's been taken from each farm's bulk tank – for testing according to Federal law.” Once the milk is delivered, the sheet and vials are sent to the MMPA. Each vial's barcode is scanned and its milk tested for quality. The weight sheets and test results are then entered into the database and matched up, FlexiCapture verifies everything and payments are issued. Plus, PDFs of the weight sheets are automatically created and archived.

The results

MMPA now has several hundred farms and their haulers running on the new solution and anticipates one hundred percent adoption by year-end. “All according to schedule,” confirms Shulkey. “FlexiCapture enabled us to build in the rules we had in our application – complex rules that the old programs were responsible for following. Today, anybody can do what the clerks do. FlexiCapture is amazingly accurate and picks up an unbelievable amount of information. The system also catches exceptions automatically and displays the related data for verification – which virtually anyone can do. “It's really helped us to ‘future proof’ our operations from a business continuity point of view.”

Shulkey also explains that FlexiCapture is helping in another important way: “We have to store the weight sheets onsite for two years – that's 75,000 weight sheets – for regular Federal audits. They come in and we physically have to pull the weight sheets. But now that we're archiving the forms as PDFs, we can give them a link on our portal where they can see the weight sheets online.” And this also brings other benefits: “We don't have 75,000 sheets from last year sitting around in boxes. Which, from a business continuity perspective is also good: Because if the building goes down, we've got the PDFs backed up elsewhere.”

Plus, Shulkey anticipates big benefits for farmers and customers, too. “We anticipate being able to put everything up on our portal much faster. Authorized users will be able to see data, look at weight sheets, track down problems and check on production much faster whether they're in their offices or out in the field.”

“Thanks to FlexiCapture, we were able to implement business rules in ways we really couldn't have done otherwise,” Shulkey says. “And UFC was a great company to work with. They have great product expertise and they share it in a professional, down-to-earth way.”

About UFC Inc.

For over 25 years, UFC Inc. has helped companies save money by automating mundane data entry and document capture tasks. Its document capture solutions deliver fast ROI by eliminating manual data entry from a wide range of activities, including invoice processing, purchase order processing, and data extraction from paper and electronic forms.

The Challenge:

Ensure business continuity for MMPA by replacing highly complex and specialized manual data entry of forms with automated data capture and verification.

The Result:

ABBYY FlexiCapture enabled MMPA to create a solution for automating the capture and verification of forms. This ensures that, as highly specialized data clerks retire, their role can be fulfilled by virtually anyone with little or no training.

“FlexiCapture has really helped us ‘future proof’ our operations from a business continuity point of view.”

*Greg Shulkey
Director of MIS
Michigan Milk
Producers Association*

Learn more at www.ABBYY.com/FlexiCapture

ABBYY
North American Headquarters
880 N. McCarthy Blvd.
Suite 220
Milpitas, CA 95035, USA
Tel 408.457.9777
Fax 408.457.9778
sales@abbyyusa.com

www.ABBYY.com

ABBYY®