



Client



Challenge

To serve more customers and ensure total transparency and traceability across its business, Common Market needed to replace its manual operations with a more sophisticated, automated approach to business management

Solution

The company selected the Food Connex Cloud food management system, based on the Progress® OpenEdge® application development & SaaS platform

Benefit

By automating its entire operation, Common Market has made a significant impact on the local farm-to-city problem, growing its business 20-fold over six years to serve 200 customers through its work with 75 local farmers. And the company recently launched a new farm-to-office program, which is already serving 1,000 families

Socially Conscious Food Distributor Connects Local Farmers and the Community with the Help of Food Connex Cloud and Progress® OpenEdge®

Most people would choose fresh, nutritious food if it were available to them. But unfortunately for many, that is not an option. Over the years, the gap between the farm and the consumer has continued to widen. The consequences have been particularly hard on cities and the most vulnerable communities.

This farm-to-city problem is what Tatiana Garcia-Granados and her husband, Haile Johnston, set out to overcome six years ago. In 2008, the two founded Common Market in an effort to establish a distribution link between threatened local farms and urban communities lacking access to affordable and healthy, fresh food. Today, the company provides the infrastructure to connect public and private schools, hospitals, universities, grocery stores and workplaces to good food grown by the region's sustainable farmers. Starting with just a few farms and customers six years ago, Common Market has made a significant impact on the local farm-to-city problem, growing its business by 20-fold over six years to serve 200 customers through its work with 75 local farmers.

A significant factor behind the organization's sustained growth is the company's IT infrastructure. In its first year of business, Common Market was able to manage operations manually and by using QuickBooks for

their accounting needs. “Working with only a handful of farmers at the time, we were able to keep things straight ourselves,” explains Garcia-Granados. “But as we started to grow and serve more farms, we realized it was going to be impossible to keep that total transparency and traceability that was so core to our mission. As part of our effort to restore that relationship between farmers and consumers, we track the identity of the farm throughout our whole process and then include that information on the labels and invoices. We knew eventually we wouldn’t be able to provide that level of information with our manual processes. We needed a more efficient and automated way to run our business.”

After reviewing the various options on the market, Common Market chose Philadelphia-based software provider Integrated Management Solutions and its Food Connex Cloud Food Management System, based on the Progress® OpenEdge® platform. “We were really excited to support a local business. And they met our three primary requirements,” says Garcia-Granados. “First, they offered a cloud-base solution. We didn’t want to be relegated to sitting in our office. We needed a system that empowered us to be on the farms or with customers, submitting orders and viewing inventory in real time.”

The second key factor was the solution’s ability to support the company’s high standards for transparency and traceability. Common Market maintains a high

level of transparency and accountability at every step in the process, from growing and producing to storage and distribution. “For us that was a mandatory feature; how much information we could actually store and print on the labels and invoices about where the food came from,” says Garcia-Granados.

And third, cost played a significant role in the decision to choose Food Connex Cloud. “Food businesses are very low margin organizations, and so we needed to be conscious of the cost of the solution. We couldn’t implement a technology system that was going to absorb our entire profit margin,” explains Garcia-Granados. “With a cloud-based system there is no hardware or software investment, no ongoing costs associated with maintenance and no need for on-site IT support.” Common Market also appreciated that Food Connex Cloud would easily integrate with their existing QuickBooks accounting system.

Today, Common Market relies on Food Connex Cloud to run their entire operations, from purchasing, pricing, and invoicing to inventory management and real-time sales reporting. Common Market’s goal is to get good food from the farm gate to the wholesale customer as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible via one order, one delivery, and one bill. Food Connex Cloud has made that possible.

Common Market aggregates food in its warehouse and delivers five days a week to its 200 customers throughout the Delaware Valley. Customers order case-load quantities of food from Common Market’s consolidated availability list, representing the full bounty of seasonal food produced in the local region by Common Market’s network of sustainable farmers. Food Connex Cloud tracks all of the activity associated with the company’s sales, inventory and deliveries.

“With Food Connex Cloud, our customers now know exactly where their food is coming from,” says Garcia-Granados. As Common Market receives product from the farms and fulfills customer orders, Food Connex

“Our sales grew from \$100,000 in 2008 to \$1,700,000 in 2013. That’s an average annual growth rate of 57% over six years. It would have been impossible to realize this level of growth without Food Connex Cloud and Progress OpenEdge.”

Tatiana Garcia-Granados
Co-founder, Common Market

Cloud tracks all of the vital information. Then using the product's "brand feature" they are able to automatically include information on the invoice or labels about the individual farms that produced that specific product. "With Food Connex Cloud we are able to maintain our grower's identity throughout the process of distribution so that our customers know exactly what they are getting and from where. We provide our farmers' name and location on each case of food, as well as on each invoice so our customers can be confident that they are getting the freshest local produce available."

Common Market is using the picking labels option in Food Connex Cloud, which makes things easier for both Common Market and its customers. Because the customer's name is clearly labeled on the product, the drivers and customers no longer have to check product against an invoice during delivery. The invoices themselves are also much cleaner and easier to understand because Food Connex Cloud displays the catch weights and quantities properly, such as by eches and cases.

Because Common Market serves so many institutional kitchens, like hospitals and schools, they are required to have a third-party food safety audit. The company also conducts mock recalls twice a year. "These are complicated efforts, and without an automated system they would take hours or even days to complete," explains Garcia-Granados. "But with Food Connex Cloud, it is as simple as running a report. The system creates automatic traceability, which is a critical issue in food safety within our industry."

"Our decision to stay with Progress is a performance decision. Progress OpenEdge has continued to perform stronger as the years have gone by. It is a really testament to the way Progress has continued to improve their application development platform to stay ahead of our needs."

Paul Hernandez-Cuebas
President, Integrated Management Solutions

Increasing Service to the Community through Improved Productivity, Efficiency and Visibility

Garcia-Granados says implementing Food Connex Cloud has had a dramatic impact on their business and ability to serve the community. "Our sales grew from \$100,000 in 2008 to \$1,700,000 in 2013. That's an average annual growth rate of 57% over six years. It would have been impossible to realize this level of growth without Food Connex Cloud and Progress OpenEdge."

But for Common Market, it has never been about the money, but the mission. "Food Connex Cloud was such a game changer for us because it allowed us to serve more customers, work with more farmers and support more products," says Garcia-Granados. "We started with just one-day-a-week delivery and we are now up to five-day-a-week delivery, which means we can support more customers and their diverse needs. That would have been impossible to accomplish manually."

The ability to automate operations has impacted every level of the organization, says Garcia-Granados. "Now that we can support multiple deliveries per week, we are attracting larger customers which is increasing our sales. In the past it took us all week just to manage the basics for one-day-a-week delivery, including order entry, reporting and inventory management. Now, all of

that is taken care of automatically in real time, which gives our staff more time to focus on fulfilling our mission and supporting the needs of our community.”

For example the increased efficiency, productivity and visibility afforded by Food Connex Cloud and Progress OpenEdge have enabled the company to launch new initiatives. Common Market recently unveiled a farm-to-office program and has already partnered with 28 workplaces. “So many employers really want to create a healthier workplace and culture. So we have been partnering with them to figure out how we can make food a part of that conversation. We are already serving about 1,000 families through the program, and it is growing fast,” says Garcia-Granados. Today Common Market is able to manage the farm-to-office initiative with Food Connex Cloud just like any other part of their business.

A Soft Side to a Hard Business

The food business is a hard industry. And being located in the Mid-Atlantic States, Common Market is surrounded by some of the toughest markets in the world. But the company has a distinctly different approach to business, says Paul Hernandez-Cuebas, President of Integrated Management Solutions. “Common Market’s humility in which they approach the business is very refreshing. They show there really can be a soft side to a hard business.” Common Market expects to continue on its growth trajectory, estimating a 30% growth rate for 2014. However, Garcia-Granados is careful to note that the company is heavily focused on ensuring that growth is sustainable. “Our goal is to be around for the long-term so that we can continue to really have an impact on the farms and the consumers.”

While Common Market remains focused on its local community, the company also recognizes how important it is to make connections across the country to support the broader farm-to-table effort. The company has been working with various food hubs around the nation, taking a leadership role in helping other groups establish similar initiatives. Garcia-Granados says Common Market is also spreading the word when it comes to the value of Food Connex Cloud. “It shocks me how many companies are still running their operations manually like we used to. I tell them there is a better way. Particularly for mission-aligned or mission-based food work companies that are on a very tight budget, a cloud-based solution like Food Connex Cloud is really perfect fit.”

Integrated Management solutions and Progress: Partners in Innovation

Integrated Management Solutions, with their Food Connex product line, is the industry leader in food management solutions, offering both an on-premise and cloud-based version of its system. A Progress application partner for 24 years, Integrated has never had to consider changing its Progress OpenEdge platform, explains Hernandez-Cuebas. “Our decision to stay with Progress is a performance decision. Progress OpenEdge has continued to perform stronger as the years have gone by. It is a really testament to the way Progress has continued to improve their application development platform to stay ahead of our needs.”

Customers that use the Food Connex solutions are primarily small to medium food distribution companies ranging from \$3 million to \$50 million companies. And the majority of these customers do not maintain an IT staff. “Our marketplace can’t support an Oracle database; it’s just too expensive,” explains Hernandez-Cuebas. “But the low total cost of ownership, reliability and low maintenance of Progress OpenEdge makes it a great fit for our industry.”

Hernandez-Cuebas says Progress continues to give Integrated Management Solutions the tools they need to keep pace with market change and customer requirements. “The ability to continue to grow and evolve our solutions without having to go through the throws of changing our database has been a significant factor in our success – not only technically, but economically as well.”

Integrated recognized early on that the Internet would be a perfect fit for its customers. Five years ago the company moved its on-premise Progress OpenEdge-based application to the cloud. “The cloud serves the needs of our customers so well. They don’t have to manage their own servers or software updates. They can keep their IT costs low and rely on us for any support. All they need is a browser and they are ready to go. Having a cloud solution has absolutely set us apart in the market and given us a competitive advantage. Progress has been instrumental in helping us to make that happen.”

About Progress

Progress (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global leader in application development, empowering the digital transformation organizations need to create and sustain engaging user experiences in today’s evolving marketplace. With offerings spanning web, mobile and data for on-premise and cloud environments, Progress powers startups and industry titans worldwide, promoting success one customer at a time. Learn about Progress at www.progress.com or 1-781-280-4000.

Progress and OpenEdge are trademarks or registered trademarks of Progress Software Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries or affiliates in the U.S. and/or other countries. Any other trademarks contained herein are the property of their respective owners.

© 2016 Progress Software Corporation and/or its subsidiaries or affiliates. All rights reserved.
Rev 16/05

About Common Market

Common Market is a mission-driven distributor of local foods to the Mid-Atlantic region. Its mission is to strengthen regional farms while making the local bounty accessible to communities and the institutions that serve them. Common Market provides the infrastructure to connect public and private schools, hospitals, universities, grocery stores and workplaces to good food grown by the region’s sustainable farmers.

www.commonmarketphila.org

About Integrated Management Solutions

Headquartered in suburban Philadelphia, the Integrated Management Solutions Food Connex team brings over 100 years of management experience in the food distribution industry and over 20 years in software development. The company provides “no-nonsense” yet innovative, food software solutions and support services to processors and distributors of all sizes and shapes. Integrated Management Solutions’ Food Connex customers, located all over the United States, range from full-line distributors to distributors and processors who specialize in all types of meat, poultry, seafood, produce, dairy, grocery and specialty items.

www.foodconnex.com

