

CASE IN PRINT

DFA Milks Benefits from Mainframe-based Report Archive

When American consumers buy milk, cheese, or other dairy products, the odds are good that Dairy Farmers of America was involved in making the products available. Owned by its member farmers operating in 46 states, DFA is the nation's largest producer-owned dairy marketing cooperative and markets approximately 50 billion pounds of milk each year.



In its efforts to market 29 percent of the US milk supply, DFA is a progressive cooperative working to develop new products and new markets for dairy products. In its internal operations, DFA is a conservative organization.

Joel Clark, DFA's vice president of Information Technology, described the cooperative as slower to adopt new technologies than other businesses.

"It's our nature to be fairly frugal with our resources," noted Clark. "We're a cooperative owned by dairy farmers, and farmers in general are fairly frugal. They tend to wear everything out at least twice before they buy something new."

The DFA data center, a mainframe shop for decades, follows its frugal nature as it processes business information and thousands of pages of paper reports each week. For years, DFA's chosen medium for archiving and distributing reports has been microfiche.

"We would microfiche critical reports and distribute them to our 80 office locations," Clark explained. "We have printers in all of our offices and we print some reports remotely. Larger reports and the ones that needed to be retained for long periods of time would be put on microfiche. Sometimes, in addition to printing and microfiche for archive, we would mail those microfiche out to all 80 locations."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dairy Farmers of America, a dairy marketing cooperative owned by dairy farmer members, saved more than \$150,000 a year in microfiche equipment, supplies, and maintenance costs by implementing the LRS solution for Web browser-based viewing of system-generated reports. LRS software also provided DFA with unforeseen savings in employee time.



Producing and distributing microfiche requires equipment and staff; employees in remote locations need equipment to make use of microfiche. All of the equipment, including the production machine and every microfiche reader and printer, cost DFA thousands of dollars in annual maintenance and supplies. Purchasing replacements as microfiche equipment wore out cost thousands more.

In an effort to reduce archiving costs, DFA began to evaluate mainframe-based archiving systems. The cooperative discovered that some software solutions would have required years of work

to integrate into DFA's existing systems, in addition to the purchase price. DFA found a better solution when it evaluated archiving products from LRS.

SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS

LRS software implementation was completed in a matter of days, according to Clark, and the LRS solution integrated perfectly with DFA's operations. The cooperative quickly discovered that archiving reports on the mainframe for viewing instead of printing and producing microfiche would add up to substantial savings. Clark estimated that DFA is saving more than \$150,000 per year by using LRS software (see chart).

DFA'S ANNUAL SAVINGS

Elimination of Microfiche Hardware Purchase and Maintenance	\$ 47,724
Print Spooling Software Maintenance Replacement	48,996
Fiche Supplies	16,550
Fiche Mailing and Storage	17,400
Paper Savings and Storage	25,000
Printer Ribbons	1,850
Total Annual Savings	\$ 157,520

The LRS solution enables individuals to view archived reports using standard Web browsers on multiple platforms. That capability fits with DFA's long-term plans.

"We're very big on the idea of the Web browser being the ultimate application, so that all you need on your desktop is a Web browser and you're done," Clark explained.

"We're still headed toward that direction, and the LRS solution just kind of fell into place; it was exactly what we needed."

The hard dollar savings provide a measurable return on DFA's investment. Clark said the LRS solution has also provided a savings in time that is difficult to quantify.

TIME SAVINGS

"What you don't see in a listing of hard-dollar savings is the time it takes an employee to get up from their desk, go to the box that has the fiche in it, flip through the box, find the fiche they're looking for, and then get into the microfiche reader and go searching around finding the page they need," Clark explained. "If they need to print the page, the printer often cuts off the right side so they've got to shift it over a little bit and print it again and then go refile the microfiche. When they go back to their desk with the one piece of paper that they need, they realize they just spent 20 minutes getting it."

"We have 1800 defined users in our system, and if 25 percent of those people need to access historical records, then you have 450 people getting up and getting records on microfiche. Now, with the LRS software, they don't even have to leave their desks, they can instantly pull up anything they want. That's a huge time savings that I can't even begin to quantify."

The employees who have been accessing data on microfiche work in DFA office locations, but they aren't the only ones to benefit from browser-based report viewing. As many as 300 DFA employees might be on the road at any time without access to any paper or microfiche reports. The LRS solution now enables those employees to view information they need at the time they need it.

"Because our sales invoices and our sales reports automatically go into the LRS system, our salespeople can view them without fumbling with paper reports," said Clark. "With our VPN connections, our people can pull information up on the road or from home that they previously couldn't access because the microfiche or the paper report would be back in their office. Well, they can pull it up using the LRS solution from the road and see anything they want."

UNFORESEEN SAVINGS

Web-based viewing has also saved time and dollars in a way the cooperative did not anticipate.

"Our system writes a hundred thousand milk checks a month to pay our members for their milk," Clark explained. "When we would make program changes, we would always generate test checks, fax them to people and have them review the checks to see if they were correct. They would see only a sampling, whatever we faxed them, and they would tell us to implement the change. This process would obviously take time.

"Now our program testing is unbelievably fast because we just spool that data right into the LRS system, those people review the whole job, if there are 15,000 checks in their division, they can review all 15,000 and look for any mistakes. I know in one case we found some mistakes on some checks that would have cost thousands of dollars to correct if they would have left the building. We were able to find the problem because we were able to see them in a browser within five minutes after the job completed. So that's been a wonderful thing about the LRS solution that wasn't really contemplated in the beginning."

All of the benefits that DFA has realized from the LRS solution—savings in costs and savings in time—have come without additional workload on the data center.

"We don't have anybody who had to become our LRS expert," Clark said. "We have a systems person who oversees installations and performs upgrades, but we don't have anybody who has to be the guru. A lot of software requires a full-time caretaker, but this LRS software is really painless."

DFA FACTS

- 50 billion pounds of milk processed and marketed per year
- 24,193 dairy farmer members on 14,422 dairy farms
- \$7 billion gross annual sales

LRS Solution

Dairy Farmers of America implemented the LRS solution for viewing mainframe reports via Web browsers instead of distributing them on paper or microfiche. The solution consists of VPS® and PageCenter Web Access.

VPS delivers documents from the JES spool on the z/OS or OS/390 mainframe to a variety of destinations, including network printers, email addresses, fax servers, remote servers, and the PageCenter archive.

PageCenter maintains a multi-level archive of reports on the mainframe. PageCenter Web Access works with Web server software on multiple platforms to make reports viewable with standard Web browsers. By maintaining security on the mainframe, PageCenter Web Access provides access to reports only for authorized users.

DFA utilizes additional LRS software to manage application output throughout the enterprise

DRS and **DRS/TCPIP** capture documents from computer platforms throughout the organization and monitor the documents as they are processed and delivered to their destination.

VPS/TCPIP works with VPS to deliver documents to various destinations on TCP/IP networks.

VPS/PCL converts AFP-formatted documents to PCL for printing on standard laser printers.

VPS/Email works with VPS to deliver mainframe output to email addresses anywhere.



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