



## Gay Lea Foods

Tuesday, November 4, 2014

Canada's agricultural co-operative history is rich and co-ops have always been an integral part of the Canadian food system. However, most consumers are unaware that Gay Lea Foods, an organization that has provided them with top quality dairy products for years, is in fact, a co-operative!

Founded in 1958, Gay Lea set out to improve the general welfare of farmers and other co-operators in Ontario. From a humble beginning, their dedication to high quality products and innovation led them to operate eight production facilities across the province that currently employ 900 people. Owned by over 1200 Ontario farmers, Gay Lea has a reputation for providing wholesome dairy products that families know and trust. Their products include milk, cream, butter, sour cream, cottage cheese, whipped cream, traditional Canadian and Italian cheese, cheese shreds and blends.

Aside from manufacturing traditional food staples, they pride themselves on innovation and ensure that they are constantly offering new products to the marketplace. Gay Lea recently acquired Salerno Dairy and Hewitt's Dairy - companies that will allow them to produce Italian cheeses, goat's milk, and ice cream which gives customers a more diverse set of products to choose from.

Their membership is divided into four zones represented by 60 delegates, from which 10 board members are elected. Gay Lea has won awards for this governance model since it is transparent, involved and focused on positive development. Their membership structure also ensures that delegates are part of the decision making process and that there is strong communication with the board.

In the past eight years alone, Gay Lea been recognized among the top 100 companies in Canada and top 50 in the GTA. The Canadian Co-operative Association has also presented them with awards for their leadership training and commitment to international development.



In addition to strong business practices, Gay Lea believes strongly in the 7<sup>th</sup> principle of co-operation and supports rural initiatives and communities where their members live. Their contributions span local hospitals, schools, food banks, fundraisers, 4-H clubs, agricultural societies and fairs, and many other initiatives. Gay Lea's new Co-operative Leadership Program, aimed at engaging young farmers in leadership and co-operative principles, is also doing well and just had its second cohort graduate in 2014 with more classes planned for the future.

The future looks bright for Gay Lea. Their dedication to co-operative principles is leading to diversification of their product lines with strategic, sustainable growth being their main strategy moving forward.

To learn more, connect with them on social media or visit their webpage.

<http://www.gaylea.com/>

Written by: Sam Lidstone

