



OCA Board Member Profile



Jennifer Woodhouse, Director, Gay Lea Foods Co-operative
Representing Gay Lea Foods Co-operative on the Board of OCA

1. Tell us a bit about yourself (i.e., your background (where you grew up, education, children, which co-operative you work for, your position, etc.)

I am a proud Canadian dairy farmer and Gay Lea Foods member, working alongside my husband and our four daughters, milking 50 purebred Holsteins on our family farm near Meaford, Ontario. I graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College and work as an associate veterinarian in The Town of the Blue Mountains. I am also honoured to have served on the board of directors for Gay Lea Foods for the past three years and the Ontario Co-operative Association for the past two.

2. How long have you been involved in the co-operative movement, and what do you love most about it?

My introduction to the co-operative movement began in 1995 when I married into the dairy farming life and joined Gay Lea Foods as a producer member. I quickly began to realize that co-operatives do things differently! Co-operatives achieve success by leading with values and upholding commitment to the 7 Co-operative principles. I am proud to

belong to a progressive dairy co-operative that supports their producers, their families and their rural communities while continuing to drive growth and innovation in the Canadian dairy industry.

3. If there is one thing you would want people to know about co-ops, what would it be?

As I mentioned: Co-ops do things differently! We are owned by our members and operate respectfully for the benefit of our members with integrity, commitment, correct moral values, consideration and courtesy. Co-operatives are rooted and controlled by the community and are incredibly powerful.

4. Why is your co-operative a member of OCA?

Gay Lea Foods has been a long-standing supporter of the Ontario Co-operative Association. OCA acts as the single powerful voice for all Ontario co-operatives, striving for the betterment of the whole industry. There is added strength when as many individual co-operatives from across all sectors come together united.

5. What do you think are some of the benefits of being a member of OCA?

Member benefits are numerous. An exceptional example would be the associations valuable ability to correspond with government officials as a unified voice for all Ontario co-operatives. We have made remarkable advances recently with our government relations and requests. Another huge benefit is the quality and quantity of information and expertise that OCA has available to any individual requesting information about the Ontario co-operative sector.

6. Why did you decide to join the OCA board as a Director?

As a member of the board I am privileged to be part of a positive, passionate team of co-operative leaders representing different sectors and parts of our province. We are all unified in our desire to advocate for the co-operative industry and spread the knowledge and good news of the numerous benefits the co-operative movement can bring to society.

7. How has your past experience helped you in this role?

Gay Lea Foods has been instrumental in my preparation for a director role through the immense amount of training opportunities provided to its delegate body to properly

prepare and educate members to participate in the co-operative industry. I bring to the board table this added knowledge and my passion for the co-operative model to be understood and applied more frequently for the benefit of our society.

8. What do you think are some of the opportunities and challenges facing OCA in the next 3 - 5 years?

A huge opportunity for OCA is the increased inclusion of our youth in co-operative training and education. These youth are the upcoming leaders of the future co-operative sector, and it is vital to positively engage them today. We will be pleasantly challenged to continue the positive momentum OCA has created in the advancement of our provincial co-operative industry in many areas, including government relations, administrative support and education, to name a few.

9. What is your vision for OCA?

I envision OCA to continue to be the active advocate for Ontario co-operatives it currently is. We will have representation on the board from all sectors of the co-operative industry and be the first source of information for anyone seeking co-operative knowledge. It would be truly exciting to have all Ontario co-operatives be active members of our association, so we are all connected as we boldly spread the message of how beneficial the co-operative model is to our world. We have a strong future ahead of ourselves. Let's work together to get this good news out!

10. Share a fun/silly thing that not many people know about you!

I have a sheep fetish! I currently own 95 wooly creatures and encourage youth to share my sheepish love through the 4H program. I am an active 4H leader and can be found on weekends trucking numerous lambs and 4H members to various county fairs. One day I aspire to be the official judge at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Junior sheep show.