



The Data Challenge

A market leader in innovation adopts a solution and breaks through barriers to meet the needs of its member districts.

School Districts, Purchasing Co-ops, and State Agencies often invest millions of dollars in software to help them properly account for school meals. Each K-12 Operator makes unique choices to procure products and gather the necessary data from a wide variety of sources required to document compliance with complex federal nutrition requirements for reimbursable school meals. The accessibility and accuracy of that data impacts the performance of their back of the house software for routine functions like menu planning, forecasting, production records, purchasing, inventory, and financial reporting, often with unintended negative consequences.

The Region 10 ESC Multi-Region Purchasing Cooperative (R10MRPC) is one of the largest food purchasing co-ops in the state of Texas and the United States. They organize, administer, tabulate, advertise and award bids, acting as a coordinating center for all food purchasing bids on behalf of 271 member school districts in Texas serving approximately one million meals daily. The goal of the R10MRPC is to offer its member districts substantial savings on specific commercial food items, non-food items, and USDA commodity processed items and expertise on compliance with procurement regulations.

R10MRPC Program Coordinator Keri Warnick is recognized as a data champion who has long sought a solution to drive greater supply chain efficiencies and avoid redundant efforts across her member districts. A progressive innovator, Keri is unafraid to leverage her purchasing power on behalf of her member districts to drive positive industrywide change.



"One of the biggest challenges since COVID has been keeping our members updated with the constant changes in pricing, product availability, and discontinuations. For our member districts that use their back of the house software to plan menus and prepare forecasts, getting this product information into each of their applications—and keeping it up to date—has been another challenge."

Keri Warnick
Program Coordinator
Region 10 ESC MRPC

The Solution: Industrywide Standards & Protocols

The Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) is an internet-based, interconnected network of data governed by GS1 standards. GDSN is the common language used by USDA, manufacturers, distributors and operators to communicate electronically across the foodservice industry supply chain. K-12 foodservice operators have been slow to adopt the use of GDSN in their procurement practices. GDSN Connect is a data exchange software that leverages six years of ongoing industrywide collaboration to develop and maintain the K-12 specific Nourish to Flourish Database; adopting the Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) standards and protocols for data sharing.

The Nourish to Flourish Database contains ~ 200,000 items, using GDSN standardized product information from GDSN, USDA, and other sources accessible to K-12 operators. Examples of product data available through the database include product names, images, nutrients, allergens, meal pattern credits, ingredients, handling information, and pack size information.

Beyond simply accessing product specifications, GDSN Connect also provides users with the ability to export standardized and complete product data into their existing software applications. Standardization is achieved by specialized algorithms that test record integrity and link each item to an official data source. The solution also makes it easy to share contracted vendor catalogs and recipes to electronically produce bid specifications based on GDSN standards for simpler and more competitive procurements.



Global Data Synchronization Network® (GDSN®):

A unified global data aggregator where high-quality branded product content is uploaded, maintained and shared automatically, ensuring trading partners have immediate access to the most current and complete information needed to exchange products. Each item carries a unique GTIN® (Global Trade Item Number).



"Your procurement program should request GTIN technology during the solicitation process. Regardless of whether you have an electronic inventory system, include GTIN numbers in your inventory management."

USDA Menu Planner for School Meals
(Chapter 5 Procurement and Inventory Management p. 191)



"Awarded vendors are required to utilize the Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) and to provide GTINs (Global Trade Identification Numbers) in the bid response."

Texas Region 10 MPRC Procurement Requirement

Building a Coalition of Stakeholders

R10MRPC purchased inTEAM's GDSN Connect software solution for its members to help overcome data challenges with easily accessible product specifications from the Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) to streamline their operations and ease the burden of a constantly changing supply chain.

Keri has remained in contact with key stakeholders and data providers to assure compatibility with the new consolidated solution. This includes manufacturers, distributors, and software providers. In each case a sustainable format has been defined to electronically transfer data across systems. The common language of GDSN forms the core of these business processes.

"Using product specific and universally recognized GTIN codes (often referred to as UPC codes), operators can search for planned, new, or substituted products critical to program compliance and effective supply chain management."

Keri Warnick
Program Coordinator
Region 10 ESC MRPC

This partnership couldn't have come at a better time due to the uncertainty and unpredictability we face in regard to product availability and supply chain issues. I knew right away that having GDSN data loaded and available was going to save me a lot of time locating the information I need, and keeping everything up to date. I also volunteered as a 'first mover' assisting with testing the exchange of GDSN Connect data with my current menu planning software. Thanks Keri!

Brittney Sanders | Child Nutrition Director | Glen Rose Independent School District | MRPC Member

Wild Mike's Pizza was pleased to respond to the request from MRPC to publish our product information to Nourish to Flourish to make our GDSN data available to her members. It was easy to do, our content remains current, and our K-12 customers have everything they need to include our products on their menus. It's a win-win.

Dawn Irvine | K-12 Operations Manager | Wild Mike's Pizza

Software Providers Have Also Adopted the Common Language of GDSN

R10MRPC would like to acknowledge and thank the following software providers for their collaboration and support of our use of GDSN Connect to communicate product information to our members. By integrating with GDSN Connect and the Nourish to Flourish (N2F) Database*, our members have access to accurate and up-to-date product information in their existing software without having to manually enter it themselves. We appreciate their support as this enables MRPC to use the Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) as the basis for sharing information across all stakeholders in our procurements.

For R10MRPC members, **GDSN Connect is intended to complement, but not replace, their existing back of the house software.** Product reports for their software can be matched to standardized items from the N2F Database to enhance that product data, and this information is then exported back into their existing software. This accurate data fully enables the functionality within their existing software, such as menu planning, production records, forecasting, inventory, and purchasing. GDSN Connect is a big step forward in the sharing of standardized product information using the common language of GDSN combined with access to the industry wide Nourish to Flourish Database.



* Each application may provide different levels of integration support and may require application or version updates for the most complete functionality.

Putting GDSN Standards to Work



The data challenges that Keri is addressing with GDSN Connect are not unique. Districts large and small, each with different software configurations and operating styles, all require clean data to operate efficiently. For this reason, Keri has implemented new procurement requirements for the use of GDSN to ensure that her vendors publish their item data to the Nourish to Flourish Database. She also took a lead role working with all the software providers used by her member districts to help facilitate the development of the export tools to transfer GDSN standardized data to their existing software. GDSN Connect is the missing link for K-12 operators to build and maintain standardized data from a single unified industrywide resource. Keri has also encouraged her districts to use language requiring import of GDSN standardized data when procuring or renewing software agreements.

Challenges

The Old Way

A Better Way



Internal Communications

Item data is often out of date due to changes in ingredients, recipes, and pricing, requiring the use of e-mail and manual spreadsheets.

A better way to communicate accurate and current information electronically and accessible on demand as a single 'go to' resource for operators.



Keeping Existing Software Up to Date

Tedious and error prone data entry with software systems using different approaches and slow adoption of data standards.

A better way to automatically update existing software with standardized data from GDSN Connect for day to day functions.



Supply Chain Communications

Inadequate product descriptions and use of non-standard proprietary codes hinder accurate communication.

A better way to communicate externally with supply chain partners who already use GTINs to generate more accurate forecasts to improve supply chain information flow.



Testing New Ideas

Intensive effort needed to gather the required specifications and accurate pricing.

A better way to easily create new menus and recipes using a sandbox environment with standardized data to test new ideas and pre-cost menus.



Competitive Procurement

Non-standard specifications are subject to interpretation making evaluations difficult and prone to error.

A better way to communicate product specifications, define the objective attributes and compare 'or equal' offers for more competitive procurements.



Food Safety & Traceability

No consistent and reliable source to isolate products during a recall.

A better way to trace critical elements during a recall. GTINs are extensible to include a 128-character code to further identify lot and batch numbers.