

Cooper Farms

Move from RM/COBOL to Visual COBOL delivers modern development toolset delivering efficiency gains



Overview

As a diverse, vertically integrated company, Cooper Farms consists of two divisions. The Live Animal Division is responsible for overseeing the care of animals while they mature, and for manufacturing the feed that keeps them healthy and strong. The Food Processing Division is responsible for the production and packaging of high quality meats. All Cooper Farms operations are located in Northwest and West Central Ohio—an area rich in agricultural tradition.

Challenge

In the 1980s, Cooper Farms purchased the source code of an accounting system which they then spent many years customizing to their own specific requirements. The solution

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JOSE FALLER

Director of Technology
Cooper Farms

is responsible for processing payroll, accounts receivable, general ledger, and all other business accounting within Cooper Farms. It now consists of 2,200 programs and 1.7 million LOC (lines of code). During the 1990s, the application code was converted to Micro Focus® RM/COBOL, a stable, high performance COBOL deployment platform, designed to maintain and modernize applications.

Jose Faller, Director of Technology for Cooper Farms, explains what followed: “This is a business-critical application for us, with at least 50 daily users, and another 200 occasional users. When Micro Focus announced Visual COBOL, we wondered if this might be a logical next step for us. Although we always felt well-supported and we liked the RM/COBOL platform, we recognized the future potential of Visual COBOL, and wanted to stay ahead of the technology curve to give ourselves some development flexibility. Having a modern development environment would also make it easier for us to attract new development talent into the company.”

Although the application users are very accustomed to the existing screen interface and proficient with data entry, Faller and the team also wanted to pave the way for a future GUI front end development.



At a Glance

- **Industry**
Agriculture
- **Location**
Ohio, USA
- **Challenge**
Modernize the development environment for a business-critical solution, to attract new development talent while maintaining existing business logic
- **Products and Services**
Visual COBOL for Visual Studio
COBOL Server
- **Results**
 - + Enhanced development capabilities
 - + Mixed language support prepares path to modernization
 - + Transparent move for end-users
 - + Close collaboration with Micro Focus Professional Services

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Solution

The goal was always to maintain the business logic, carefully cultivated over a period of three decades, and create potential to improve the data and presentation layers.

Cooper Farms started the upgrade process with a Value Profile Service Day, hosted by Micro Focus Professional Services to discuss the code conversion and processes involved. A code sample was used to determine compatibility and suitability for the code conversion. Faller was impressed with the Micro Focus expertise, and decided on ongoing Professional Services support to guide Cooper Farms through the upgrade process: “Our main Micro Focus consultant made a massive difference to the success of this project. He was not only technically very knowledgeable and responsive, but he took a strategic view and made us think about where we wanted to go with our solution. It also helped that he was a great personality fit for our team, and went the extra mile to help us.”

Using Micro Focus modernization services, all 2,200 programs were converted to Visual COBOL and any errors encountered along the way were fixed. Visual Studio was used to

rebuild code following specific Cooper Farms directives. In total, the upgrade was realized within four months. The move was transparent to the end users who still have the same familiar interface to their programs.

Results

Cooper Farm’s development team of six enjoys the advantages of Visual COBOL, according to Faller: “The move to Visual COBOL was really made because we felt we needed to stay current in our development strategy. However, having made the move, our developers like the new environment. Code debugging and editing is so much easier for them and there is plenty of tool support available to use within Visual Studio.”

Cooper Farms is planning to move towards SQL databases instead of using COBOL indexed files, which will allow easier integration with a wide range of applications.

Faller concludes: “Some of our developers were so inspired they are now building web applications which has really broadened our scope as a team, and means we can offer much more to our end user clients. Although we can’t quantify this, we have seen development efficiency gains.”