

John Mullins – “Continuing education has supported my career advancement”

John Mullins has had a lifetime career within the Foodstuffs organisation, with his current role being general manager supply chain for the South Island cooperative company. This is his story.



John Mullins, Foodstuff South Island general manager supply chain: “Right from my early working years I developed an appetite for further education”

I commenced work at the age of 18 and was employed as a management cadet with Foodstuffs Christchurch in 1978. Foodstuffs is New Zealand owned and operated, with all profits and taxes remaining in New Zealand. The organisation today consists of two separate regionally-based (North Island, South Island) retailer-owned cooperative companies.

My current role encompasses the control post procurement of grocery, liquor, tobacco, fresh foods and general merchandise products across three large distribution centres (DCs) in the South Island. This inventory meets the daily requirements of the Foodstuffs retail member groups in the south, these being New World, PAK’nSAVE, Four Square, Henry’s (beer, wine and spirits) and Raeward Fresh.

Transport to stores is via a network of owned and contracted ambient and temperature-controlled fleet supported by a SAP transport management system (TMS). A SAP warehouse management system (WMS) operates across the three DCs.

Early experience

Commencing full-time work was exciting from the start and although I was initially the general dogsbody pushed from one role to another, I soon settled down to gain some early experience across key areas of the business. This included sales order process, warehouse order selection, inventory control, tobacco van sales, shipping/customs clearance, various buying roles and retail group promotions support. Eventually, I gravitated to the wholesale side of our business within warehousing and trans-

port, and into my first senior role as wholesale operations manager. In this role, I was responsible for the service to our retail members from our Christchurch and Nelson DCs and the many small branch sites we had at the time across the upper South Island. In 1988, following a nervous but exciting period and a lot of deliberation, the Foodstuffs Christchurch and Otago/Southland companies merged to form Foodstuffs South Island. It was at this time that I was promoted to the new South Island role of wholesale operations manager. The next few years flew by as this new organisation expanded at a rapid pace, opening new stores (New World, PAK’nSAVE and Four Square) and expanding its distribution networks. During this period we experienced a massive shift to ex Foodstuffs DC supply over the traditional model of direct-to-store ex our suppliers.

Extramural education

Right from my early working years I developed an appetite for further education to enhance the opportunity to grow my career within Foodstuffs, and looking back today this has certainly proved to be true. I took myself off

to polytech night classes studying business management, marketing and finance, along with further courses with the NZIM. Foodstuffs supported me through this period of extramural education, along with opportunities of international travel to attend courses, industry events and site visits.

In the early ‘90s we made big changes to our DC processes at Foodstuffs, especially the introduction of a WMS inclusive of RF technology, paperless picking, auto pallet slotting and live inventory. It was at this stage in my career that I became exposed to the important role logistics and the wider supply chain was to have across our organisation, both at wholesale and retail levels. After some research, I was keen to undertake further studies in this area.

It was the CLT Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport that caught my attention, and after some positive discussions with Walter Glass, who was running this diploma via Massey University, I enrolled with the support of Foodstuffs.

Over the next two years of extramural study, project papers, block courses over weekends

in Wellington and numerous industry site visits, I completed my diploma in 1999. It has been pleasing to see a number of my colleagues also go on to complete this same diploma.

More strategic planning

This academic achievement provided a new level of planning and development within my role. It instilled in me the confidence to think more strategically around the challenges that we had in the business at that time, particularly the large volume growth of ex DC supply and the demand for seven-day delivery service to our retail stores.

In 2000, we opened our new chilled and frozen DC at Hornby, which provided our retail stores with the ability to order these categories on an ex DC basis. Fresh produce supply is also distributed from this site. We also launched our vendor-managed inventory (VMI) programme to our supplier network around this time.

In 2007, we opened the new centralised Hornby ambient DC, which was expanded in 2014 to 48,000 sq m. This enabled us to close the older Papanui DC and convert the Dunedin DC to a true regional DC for fast-moving products only.

We are now underway with our latest project – Project Chilly Bin [see page 4] – following the purchase of adjoining land to the Hornby DC. On this we will build a large 28,551 sq m temperature-controlled DC, which is due to open in October 2018.

Looking back over my career, I can say that it has been continuing education – with the backing of Foodstuffs – that has supported my career advancement.

The Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport is offered in New Zealand by the Logistics Training Group; for further information, visit www.ltg.co.nz

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Crown Equipment	IFC, 13	Liftrucks	11	TallShips Solutions	3
Dexion NZ	5	Loscam	7	WorkSafe NZ	17