

Helping a lab make a beeline for productivity

Comvita is a natural health products company, based primarily around bee products. Since it was founded over 40 years ago, the company has had a strong emphasis on science and research, with a focus on natural products with known benefits, such as Manuka honey, Propolis, and Olive Leaf Extract.

While the products seem simple and natural, production is actually quite involved, starting with a complex supply chain. With over 40,000 hives in New

Zealand and a 800,000 olive tree farm in Australia, Comvita runs their supply chain fully from source to shelf for both honey and olive leaf, offering a level of traceability that sets them apart from their competition.

Adding to the complexity is Comvita's growing position as a global business, with the bulk of their sales across China, Asia, the US and the UK, each of which have very different regulations, tolerances and, governance procedures that must be met.

As a result, the company runs two teams, one responsible for analysis under Lab Manager Cameron Walker and the other for quality control (QC) and release, under Nia Jelleyman.



The challenge

Despite the complex nature of the supply chain both the lab and quality control teams had to that point remained very hands-on in their processes, relying on manual data entry, Excel spreadsheets to assist with complex calculations, and Word documents for specifications.

“For us, the catalyst very simply was scale.” says Walker.

“The business went through a very rapid growth curve which meant the amount of data entry and testing required became so large it was difficult to support.”

The introduction of new regulatory MPI requirements, which analytically defined what Manuka Honey is, meant adopting a new solution couldn't be put off any longer.

“We knew that the lab team was critical in maintaining the certainty of the supply chain, but because they were weighted down by the data, it was limiting our ability to do value-add work. We decided it was time to move forward – after all, if you want to remain the world leader, you need to invest in the software.”



The process

Intent on finding a single solution which could be used across both the lab and quality control teams, Comvita began by reviewing the business' requirements and evaluating software solutions, under Project Manager Nikki Findlay.

One of the primary goals was finding a solution that would enable better data security and auditability, given the large amount of data that needed to be audited.

Being able to prove traceability of all ingredients from end to end was key, according to Findlay.

"We'd experienced situations before where a new regulation would require us to pull out all previous test results in order to prove the chain of custody. We had the data, but it was all so manual."

The team also wanted a solution that would offer greater time efficiency – freeing up their skilled people to do more valued work.

"Turnaround times are always tightening up, but you can't truly speed up if you can't automate."



The solution

QLIMS cloud hosted with:

- > Worklist Module
- > CAPA Module
- > Sample Splitting and Collation Module
- > QLIMS Bridge for instrument integration
- > Custom Comvita Quality Control Module

QLIMS



The results

The big win for Comvita since the introduction of the QLIMS system has been the speed and decision-making benefits provided by greater data availability, with information from the lab instruments importing straight to the database, and into BI reporting.

Says Walker,

“The biggest improvement we’ve noticed has been in productivity. We believe that QLIMS has contributed a time saving of 20% for our lab technicians.”

“We’ve also linked QLIMS to our ERP system via the cloud, allowing us to run Business Intelligence dashboards. This means people are able to slice the data as they need to make decisions in real time, - You can’t do that if the data is in a spreadsheet.”

Making better use of the data is already demonstrating its value, according to Walker.

“We do more testing than other honey companies but had never used the data to deliver a competitive advantage. We now can pull that data and it’s enabling us to do some very cool stuff.”

Comvita is also extending the benefits of faster data availability to add value to their suppliers. Now, as soon as test results are received the supplier gets notified, allowing them to know the value of their honey early.

It’s an added value service for our suppliers.

“Honey production is very seasonal and want to know early how well they are doing, so they can make decisions. Access to information like that early is beneficial for any business owner.”



Final thoughts?

Findlay believes there was definitely a learning curve for both parties.

“We knew right from the beginning that their OTS product would need customisation as we weren’t just implementing a solution for the Lab, but for the QC department as well. While they needed to use the same system, they had different requirements. It’s been a team thing, our QC team taught them as we built out our scope, and OnQ did a good job of adapting to the challenge. For both of us, the journey continues.”

Walker agrees.

“The best thing about working with OnQ was their enthusiasm. They were keen to learn everything about us quickly, and we have really got to a point when they truly understand our business, which is amazing.”

