

WILLOW RUN FOODS

Willow Run Foods and Ryder

Faster, Smarter, Better, Together.

In 1949, Willow Run Foods, Inc. (Willow Run) started as a small egg-delivery business serving “mom and pop” restaurants, bakeries and schools. Since then, the company has evolved and in 1989 became an employee-owned company that distributes a wide range of food and restaurant related items, including produce, meat, bakery items, napkins, straws, and even brooms for some of the biggest names in the fast food industry, including Wendy’s, Arby’s, Checkers, Popeyes and Five Guys.

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CHALLENGE

Every week, the company must execute a smooth and on-time schedule that includes more than 2,500 stops. Every day, Willow Run must safely deliver fresh food and other products to hundreds of fast food restaurant locations.

SOLUTION

Ryder provides a customized, 100% leased fleet of 124 tractors, 15 of which are compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles, and 140 trailers. In addition, Ryder's on-site maintenance operation and team of expert technicians ensure optimal fleet performance for Willow Run's extended fleet of 138 refrigerated trailers and two dry vans.

RESULTS

Efficient

Annual fuel related savings of approximately \$100,000 from leasing 15 CNG vehicles

Sustainability

50 tons reduction in carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions annually

Satisfaction

Satisfied drivers whose vehicles are well maintained and safe

Optimized

Substitute tractors available as back-up in the event of a breakdown

Responsive

Instant access to technical and industry best practices to help drive transportation efficiencies and lower costs across the operation

Together in the shop and on the road

Willow Run serves customers in 14 states: Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Rhode Island,

Virginia, West Virginia, and Delaware, from one centralized 280,000 square foot distribution center in Kirkwood, New York. Its mission: to exceed customer expectations by providing on-time deliveries and excellent service.



Len Basso,
Vice President of Operations
Willow Run Foods

Long term partnership

More than 480 Wendy's restaurants, 325 Arby's locations, 250 Popeyes, 124 Checkers/Rally's, and 245 Five Guys locations depend on Willow Run for the storage, distribution, and timely delivery of their products. Profit margins are incredibly tight in the fast food industry, so supplies are ordered on an as-needed basis. That just-in-time type of fulfillment requires frequent deliveries to ensure freshness and reduce waste.

As Willow Run grew and expanded its customer base during the 1980s and early 1990s, the need for a well-maintained fleet to fulfill its delivery commitments became

more critical. The company was using a lease provider to supplement its existing fleet, but service levels were becoming a concern.

In 1995, Willow Run made the decision to partner with Ryder to lease 20 tractors and 24 refrigerated trailers.

"Not only was Ryder a transportation leader in the food and beverage industry, but they also made a commitment to provide and maintain a fleet that would ensure the integrity of transporting time-sensitive products from our facility to customer locations," says Len Basso, Vice President of Operations at Willow Run.

"We received quality equipment, and an extended commitment that we'd never have a truck down for more than two hours. Ryder makes good on that promise 99 percent of the time," adds Basso.

On-site maintenance sweetens success

By 2003, Willow's fleet had grown to 48 tractors and 55 trailers, and with that, the company extended its outsourcing decision to bring Ryder on-site to deliver a dedicated maintenance solution from its Kirkwood, New York location.

Willow increased the size of its maintenance area from two bays to three. Willow's four

technicians operate one bay which is dedicated to servicing the refrigerated trailer components, a second bay is used by Ryder's team of seven technicians and one service manager for maintaining the fleet of tractors and trailers, and the third is used for vehicle washing.

The Willow Run and Ryder teams of technicians work side by side. Metrics are recorded and shared to keep efficiency high and vehicle downtime to a minimum.

"There are a lot of advantages to having our transportation provider on-site," says Basso. "There's the convenience, everyday support and a team of go-to expert technicians who are there to solve problems when we're experiencing issues."

"The Ryder service manager communicates frequently with both teams of technicians," adds Basso. "The technicians collaborate on maintenance operations, identify repair concerns, and share the responsibility for vehicle uptime, which saves us time and money. The biggest improvement we've seen is less rework, improved vehicle uptime, which is at 97.11 percent, and greater satisfaction with our drivers."

Willow's team of 165 drivers makes approximately 2,500 delivery stops per week, accumulating 8.5 million miles driven per year. No truck sits idle for more than two hours at any given time.

Rick Zeh, Fleet Manager for Willow, says, "When a truck returns from its deliveries and pulls in for refueling, it's like a NASCAR event. Drivers go through the fuel island, Ryder performs its nine-point pre-trip inspection, and then the driver and truck are back out on the road, meeting tight delivery windows."

In fact, Willow Run's drivers are required to hit two hour delivery windows. Keeping the fleet running in optimal condition is not an option, but a necessity.

According to John Farner, Ryder's Director of Operations, "Willow Run's management team has high expectations of Ryder and they're always pushing us. If there's a problem with a truck, Len knows that he can call me any day of the week, any time of the day or night – and I want it that way. I may get paid by Ryder, but I work for Willow Run Foods."

In addition to maintaining the fleet, Ryder has a vested interest in the drivers who operate the trucks it services.

Ryder participates in Willow Run's quarterly driver safety meetings to provide insight on safety issues, share updates on new driver technology, answer questions or address driver concerns. Sharing best practices with the drivers not only keeps them safe, but also helps ensure their vehicles are performing the way they should.

Collaboration is key

The partnership thrives on operational excellence and that's why Willow Run and Ryder executives have a regular weekly meeting to discuss the week's transportation operations. The teams review CSA scores to gauge the fleet's performance, identify repairs, know which vehicles are out-of-service, review new equipment scheduled to arrive and other business as needed.

"Years ago, Ryder brought me to one of its high volume customer locations where they shared best practices. One of those processes, the team meetings, I brought back to Willow Run," says Basso. "The meetings give us the opportunity



to interact and discuss what's working and what needs our attention."

Norm Veilleux, Ryder's Director of Sales, adds, "From our on-site technicians to senior level executives at Ryder's headquarters in Miami, everyone is committed to Willow Run's success."

"Most important, we're solving problems in real time," adds Zeh. "I've always said that anyone can supply trucks and provide maintenance support, but Ryder does it with the expertise, efficiency, and professionalism you would expect from a company of their caliber and history. They are engaged with our company and they want us to succeed."



Going green

In 2011, Willow faced a new challenge – it had gained hundreds of new Wendy’s locations in and around the New York metropolitan area and needed an efficient transportation solution. Willow Run’s management team also wanted to reduce its carbon footprint.

For nearly a decade, Willow Run has been a good steward of energy efficient solutions, so it was a compliment that they turned to Ryder for advice on ways to reduce costs and implement green transportation efficiencies in the highly congested New York delivery area.

With extensive experience operating compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles in Arizona, Texas, California, Utah, Georgia and Michigan, Ryder introduced advanced fuel vehicles to Willow Run as an option that would reduce fleet fuel costs.

“Our Ryder team let us test and analyze the data from a CNG vehicle, and even helped us research fueling issues,” says Basso. “In this case, they helped us overcome our apprehension so we could make a good decision and move forward with the CNG vehicles.”

In early fall of 2013, Willow received a \$1 million grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and Ryder replaced 15 diesel tractors with 15 heavy-duty CNG tractors. The grant was also used to upgrade the facility to safely operate and maintain natural gas vehicles. The 15 CNG vehicles represent 12% of Willow Run’s fleet (124 leased tractors and 140 trailers).

The CNG vehicles are used in New York City, Long Island, and northern New Jersey, which helps offset emissions that would normally be generated in such a high-traffic region. Since the vehicles have a 550-mile range per tank on a single fill-up, drivers are able to complete a full delivery circuit from the company’s distribution center without having to refuel.

All vehicles (CNG and non-CNG) are equipped with an onboard computer to monitor the vehicle’s fuel usage, along with other information like driver behavior and productivity, on-time delivery data, vehicle operation, and safety.

Willow Run’s investment in the CNG vehicles, which makes it the first company to use CNG trucks for regional deliveries in the Northeast, is expected to save around \$100,000 annually (depending on diesel fuel fluctuations).

What’s next?

Willow Run must meet industry requirements including the distribution of perishable, time sensitive products. According to Basso, “We expect the emphasis on food safety will continue, putting more demand on distributors like us to track products throughout the supply chain for accountability.”

Through its partnership with Ryder, the Willow Run team is well-positioned to strengthen its transportation network and fleet as the company grows and gains additional restaurant chains to support.

WILLOW RUN FOODS

KIRKWOOD, NY

ESS THROUGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



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