



SANDRA ALTON

Asst. Corporate Secretary & Manager, Member Relations, Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Ltd.

Fun fact:

I love being in the barn with our cows when I am not in the office. We run a 150 head beef cow operation with Angus, Simmental, Shorthorn and Commercial cows, and show extensively across the country. For me, there isn't anything better than spending the day in a barn with cows, calves and my family!

Why have you joined GPC?

I didn't even know GPC existed until my colleague (and Corporate Secretary) Ove Hansen suggested I participate in the annual conference. I quickly realized it was a unique place to learn, grow and connect with professionals in the same type of role.

Why do you think GPC is an important organization for any governance professional to belong to in Canada?

I think it is important for those in a governance role to be part of GPC, not only because of best practices, but especially with the annual conference. The learning and opportunities where the cross-section of speakers vary across industry and business types provide take-aways and transferrable ideas for everyone.

How did you get into governance and your current role?

When I became part of the Member Relations Team in 2007, good governance was always at the forefront, and continues to be the foundation for decisions and policy changes at Gay Lea Foods. My role has evolved since I started as a Member Services Rep (2007), Supervisor of MR (2008), Manager of MR (2015) and appointed to Asst. Corporate Secretary (2018), and as those roles evolved, my knowledge and appreciation for governance has grown just as much. My own understanding of our bylaws, policies - and the interpretation - has been critical to my work with our Directors, Delegates and Members.

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What is the most fulfilling part about your role in governance?

I think seeing governance in action is most fulfilling for me. I am a practical person, so being able to put the “rule book” to work in real-life scenarios and/or decision making is what makes the work worthwhile in my role in governance. Growth is fulfilling for me too. The learning shouldn’t stop, and governance is no exception – organizations keep changing, growing and evolving and it is important for me to stay informed and relevant.

What do you love most about your job?

The people. Behind every successful organization is a great Team. From our members in Ontario and Manitoba, to the elected Delegates and Directors, and our Team of employees. Nothing would run the way it does without their hard work, support and encouragement!

What does governance mean to you?

For me, governance essentially means you have a “rule book” that guides your organization, but also protects if/when challenged. It is critical for any organization to ensure their “rule book” is up-to-date and, in some cases, forward reaching to ensure future success at all levels.

What is the best career advice you have received?

I grew up in a family of 4 girls on a dairy farm, and from an early age, my parents instilled in us important values that still hold true for me today in my working career:

- 1) There is no substitute for hard work; Don’t back down because something looks hard.
- 2) Start what you finish (and do it right the first time).
- 3) Never assume anything.
- 4) You are as capable as anyone, so don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.