



# Signature Foods®

## ‘People thought that there was no solution - but that was before they knew about SyncForce.’

Ever since joining Signature Foods, Lars Jansen had wanted to automate the massive flow of product information. But everyone thought that there was no viable solution for Signature Foods – until they came across SyncForce.

In the Netherlands, Signature Foods is mainly known for its Johma brand of spreads, but there is much more to its range of products. “Whenever someone asks me exactly what we do, I always say that we produce and market meal components and chilled products to accompany drinks,” says Lars Jansen, Product & Business Development Manager Foodservice. Lars joined Signature Foods just over eight years ago. Right from the start, he realized that it would be a challenge to streamline the product information.

### **Complex but not impossible**

“I often used to grumble that our method of sharing product information with GS1 was outdated. At my previous employer we had a basic software solution for this task, but at Signature Foods everything was still being done ‘by hand’ in Excel because people thought it was impossible to implement a fully automated solution.”

In 2019, Signature Foods set up a working group called ‘Working more effectively and efficiently’, which found that the quality of the data fell below the GS1 requirements. This was such a problem for major buyers like Albert Heijn and other supermarket chains that they threatened to issue fines, or even to exclude Signature Foods products from their ranges.

“Of course, we didn’t allow things to get that far,” states Jansen. “Instead, I revisited my old idea of automating the process, and we started searching for a solution that would work for us.”

### **Not a straightforward ‘Google’ search**

According to Jansen, finding a suitable system to process product information is not just a matter of conducting a straightforward ‘Google’ search. “However, we pretty soon had a clear idea of what we needed. One of our colleagues introduced us to the Zwanenberg Food Group which uses SyncForce’s Product Success Platform. It turned out that this system could do exactly what everyone had previously thought was impossible.”

It didn’t take long for Signature Foods to decide that SyncForce was the right partner for them. “I still remember our first meeting with SyncForce. Everyone allocated to work on our project had practical experience and could really identify with our situation. They weren’t just there to sell us a software package.”

The first workshops with Signature Foods and SyncForce implementation partner Acterus were mainly focused on exploring the options to find the most suitable solution. “It was a very open discussion focused on gaining clear insight into the situation rather than on just selling the system.”

### A new record?

Signature Foods and SyncForce started working together shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic. “I wanted to set a new record with the speed of this implementation,” says Jansen, with a smile. “But that didn’t quite work out. First of all our internal data quality needed to be brought up to scratch, and then we were all forced to work from home due to the COVID-19 measures. But even though we didn’t break any records and face-to-face meetings weren’t possible, we still worked very well together. Trello, Zoom and Teams are excellent tools for keeping complex processes like this running smoothly. That, coupled with the fact that people from both organizations were very committed to this project, meant that despite all the obstacles we were still able to keep the momentum going.”

**‘I think that SyncForce is an exceptionally good platform for streamlining a large part of the product development process, from the initial idea right through to the market launch.’**

Lars Jansen

Product & Business Development Manager Foodservice

### The result: efficiency and (much) more

The product information from SyncForce is now exchanged fully automatically with two databases: GS1 and PS in Foodservice. Two internal outputs have also been created; one is for the automatic printing of product information on labels so that it is always up to date, and the other is for a special set of product work instructions for the production facilities.

“This is a totally different approach for us,” continues Jansen. “In the previous set-up, we needed someone working to process the product information all day long. Obviously, that person was indispensable, as it wasn’t a role that someone else could just step into. But that is possible now, which is fortunate because our ‘product information processor’ is due to retire shortly.”

The information for around 500 different Signature Foods products is now processed using SyncForce’s Product Success Platform. According to Jansen, another major benefit of this standardization solution is that it still allows for customization. “SyncForce also uses a lot of product information for the special work instructions for the production line. That’s a very clever set-up, because it gives us a huge amount of uniformity with regard to communication and therefore efficiency.”

### Highly recommended for food companies

When asked whether he would recommend SyncForce to other companies, the answer was a resounding “Yes, of course!”. Jansen: “I think that SyncForce is an exceptionally good platform for streamlining a large part of the product development process, from the initial idea right through to the market launch. In the longer term we may also want to use other parts of the system, such as the Project Management module.”

Jansen is not only impressed with the platform, but also with SyncForce and Acterus employees. “Both teams clearly have a great deal of experience in the food sector. They have precisely the type of specialist knowledge that this kind of project requires. Both run a commercial business, of course, but everyone is genuinely interested and engaged. We felt in safe hands,” he concludes.

