

GROWMARK Leverages Zscaler and AWS To Help Keep North American Food Production Secure



GROWMARK

GROWMARK Inc.

www.growmark.com

Location: Bloomington, Illinois

Industry: Agriculture Supply

Customer Size: 500+ locations across 40 US states and Ontario.

GROWMARK is a large agricultural cooperative serving cooperatives, retailers, businesses, and customers in the U.S. and Canada. The company provides customers with fuels, lubricants, crop nutrients, crop protection products, seed, construction services, equipment, and grain marketing assistance. In addition, GROWMARK provides a host of services, from warehousing and logistics to training and marketing support.

Scalable zero trust security that doesn't disrupt business continuity

Like most organizations with distributed locations and employees working from anywhere, GROWMARK had encountered connectivity challenges well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their remote and hybrid workforce operates in over 500 rural locations that often have spotty or unreliable internet service. Faced with a sudden need to securely support remote work across all locations, GROWMARK knew that it needed to quickly establish a zero trust, cloud-first environment that could improve reliability, user experiences, and scalability by providing secure and reliable remote access into hundreds of applications. GROWMARK needed to solve these challenges quickly to keep employees working so that their customers could continue to plant essential crops.

Embracing zero trust with Zscaler and AWS

When GROWMARK decided to accelerate its digital transformation and move as many of its operations as possible to the cloud, they selected Zscaler as their partner, employing Zscaler Private Access (ZPA) to reduce the company's attack surface without impacting their users' ability to access everything required to do their jobs.

CHALLENGE

Provide zero trust access to hundreds of apps hosted on AWS and on-premises, while upgrading VPN public interfaces and technology

SOLUTION

- Zscaler Internet Access™ (ZIA™)
- Zscaler Private Access™ (ZPA™)
- Zscaler™ Zero Trust Exchange™ platform

OUTCOMES

- Transition 98% of employees to zero trust remote network access
- Provide secure remote access to internal applications on AWS with ZPA
- Reduce attack surface by reducing the number of public-facing applications and interfaces
- Significantly improve the end user experience running apps on AWS
- Strengthen security while reducing the administrative burden for IT

“We needed to provide zero trust access to hundreds of apps hosted in AWS,” explains Eric Fisher, GROWMARK’s Director of Enterprise IT systems. “I didn’t want to have public interfaces to our private environment.”

GROWMARK also wanted to tie access to identity and multi-factor authentication (MFA) to help gain better visibility into what users were doing online. ZPA gave the company the centralized visibility they needed. “We could see what users were connecting to, and what path they were taking to get there. That improved visibility just came with ZPA,” says Fisher.

As part of its effort to become a “cloud and mobile-first” company, GROWMARK realized that it would also need to replace its legacy VPN technology with a solution that could better support its remote, rural, connectivity-challenged workforce.

“Given our rural footprint and that we have over 500 locations spread over what I consider some of the toughest markets to find good connectivity, it was important that we had tolerant and resilient technology that could live on those poor connections,” says Fisher. “We found that ZPA is very tolerant of poor connectivity, and that it made secure remote access easy and friction-free for our employees.”

Reliable inline inspection at scale

GROWMARK had begun its journey with Zscaler several years earlier, initially implementing Zscaler Internet Access (ZIA) for its mobile users to perform inline inspection of all data, including encrypted traffic at scale.

“We had a real challenge with our legacy hardware. We talked to other vendors about their hardware, but none of them could guarantee that we could decrypt at scale,” says Fisher. “We needed a way to make sure we could see these unknown files, wherever they came from, and have them processed without any latency—and without physical infrastructure we’d then have to manage and maintain.”

At the time, GROWMARK chose ZIA because of its unique ability to handle the business requirement of securing all internet traffic while providing policy consistency in a cloud-first, flexible model that could be deployed by identity, not location. As a bonus, they discovered ZIA was simple to administer and transparent to users.

“We’re very happy with Zscaler and AWS. They’ve enabled us to securely deploy in the cloud at scale, and provide us the flexibility to do things like acquisitions, future-proofing, and building and deploying additional workloads in the cloud.”

– Eric Fisher
Director of IT Enterprise Systems
GROWMARK Inc.

Putting the ZPA and AWS remote-work solution to the ultimate field test

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Fisher, 98 percent of GROWMARK’s staff was working from home and connecting through Zscaler. All Internet and SaaS traffic was protected through ZIA, while secure remote access to internal applications in AWS and GROWMARK’s data centers was provided through ZPA.

Having the joint Zscaler and AWS solution in place made the shift to remote work essentially a non-event for GROWMARK. “When everyone went home, traffic through ZPA grew, with virtually no issues,” says Fisher. “Our biggest IT issue with COVID-19 was: how many monitors do our staff get to take home? It was pretty magical. It took a couple of years to get prepared for an event like this, but we were ready.”

“With ZPA and AWS, we get better security and more comprehensive visibility. We’re able to be more compliant, and it’s easier on our admins.”

– Eric Fisher
 Director of IT Enterprise Systems
 GROWMARK Inc.

ZPA: Securely Connects Users to Applications

- 1 **Zscaler Client Connector (ZCC)** - carries access request for app
- 2 **ZPA Public Service Edge** - control user app access rights (auth before access)
- 3 **ZPA App Connectors** - sit in front of apps, outbound-only connection

The Zscaler Public Service Edge secure connections between ZPA App Connectors and Zscaler Client Connectors



Delighting and supporting users while strengthening security

By implementing ZIA and ZPA with AWS, GROWMARK was able to accomplish several key goals. It safely accelerated a cloud and mobile-first strategy and delivered dependable, frictionless remote access to key systems on-premise, as well as on the AWS cloud. In addition, the company delivered superior security capabilities including SSL decryption, multi-factor authentication, and modern identity management, while simultaneously increasing visibility and administration across its IT environment.

“We’re way down the path of a zero trust model,” Fisher says. “With Zscaler and AWS, we’re removing vectors for inbound attacks, as well as tying users, via identity, to a much more granular level of access.”

According to Fisher, traffic through the Zscaler Zero Trust Exchange platform has more than doubled over the past year, with 1.8 billion transactions processed through the systems.

Perhaps most importantly, the enterprise has been transparent to GROWMARK’s users throughout the process—and they’ve been very appreciative of the day-to-day improvements the solution has delivered. “I haven’t had many IT platforms roll out where I’ve had users just randomly stop me and thank me,” Fisher says. “But the ZPA rollout was one of those. Multiple people on staff have told me they can’t believe how easy and effective the tool is.”

“Having our assets in the most powerful cloud platform, AWS, and partnering with Zscaler to get our users to that platform, was critical for GROWMARK.”

– Eric Fisher
Director of IT Enterprise Systems
GROWMARK Inc.

About Zscaler

Zscaler (NASDAQ: ZS) accelerates digital transformation so that customers can be more agile, efficient, resilient, and secure. The Zscaler Zero Trust Exchange protects thousands of customers from cyberattacks and data loss by securely connecting users, devices, and applications in any location. Distributed across more than 150 data centers globally, the SASE-based Zero Trust Exchange is the world’s largest inline cloud security platform. Learn more at [zscaler.com](https://www.zscaler.com) or follow us on Twitter [@zscaler](https://twitter.com/zscaler).

