



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

# Excellence Achieved in Government Digital Services



**VERSION 1**



*The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is the official Paying Agency for all EU agricultural support schemes in Ireland under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Agriculture is very important to the Irish economy, responsible for 7.7% of employment and 10.5% of total exports. The department administers a budget in excess of €2.5 billion.*

*Version 1 has partnered with the Department since 2014 in the design, development and support of all the core systems which enable the payments of all EU agricultural support schemes in Ireland under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). A newly redeveloped system went live in 2015 and issued over €1.2 billion of EU Direct Payments to farmers in its first year. Ireland was among the very first in Europe to make these payments in 2015.*

### **Award-winning new system sets records in online uptake and establishes Ireland as EU leader in direct payment rates.**

From 2015-2019 EU CAP reform initiatives meant the introduction of new schemes covering the Basic Payment Scheme, Greening Scheme, Young Farmer Scheme and Protein Schemes. The existing payment entitlements granted allocation rights to previous payment recipients but required complex recalculation of all entitlements for each future scheme year 2015-2019.

A review of the existing legacy applications showed that DAFM could not incorporate the substantial changes required as these systems were already in technical deficit having already incorporated 10 years of annual scheme changes. A large implementation programme was required to build new systems to meet the new scheme rules and to ensure the department could meet their obligations as an EU paying agency.

A technology selection exercise was undertaken for the new system, prioritizing supportable technologies over the projected 10 year system lifespan. New systems were built for payment processing, entitlements management, Internet portal, the processing of all 2015 and later



payments. The new systems ran in parallel with the legacy systems for processing previous scheme years. The new systems are future proofed on industry standard Java and the core application server and database platforms have well defined support paths. This is also aligned to the departments ISO 27001 certification strategy, requiring core systems to remain in support.

## Agile Development Delivers to Critical Milestones

The Version 1 team used agile principles in delivering working system components early in the project which were added to incrementally throughout the project. On the payments side, we delivered a refreshed Internet portal first in October 2014. This allowed the technology's user interface and navigation structure to be proven because requirements gathering for the new scheme was only starting. We also delivered entitlements allocation calculation routines in 2014 to allow the Department to understand the likely impacts of the new schemes and to assist them plan and shape the Irish CAP implementation.

Incremental delivery allowed key target dates to be met throughout the year. As each milestone was reached, the development for future deliveries was already in hand. This was also critical for the business team because many requirements were only clarified late in the year by the EU Commission and our team maintained the agility to accept late changes throughout.

## True Partnership in Digital Government Services

Our team worked in close partnership with the DAFM IT team who provided analyst and test functions,



issue management, as well as some development, report writing and database script management. We have acted as one single IT team to the DAFM business units. Together we participate on the department's CAP Implementation Group, project boards etc.

**“** *I would like to thank the Version 1 team who have worked so tirelessly on this project to make it such a great success. This has very much been a team effort where everyone working on entitlements, spatial and payments systems has played a vital part in delivering this challenging programme of work. We are all very proud of the achievements delivered over the last number of years; records set in online uptake, one of the first EU countries to make payments, delivery of more value added services to farmers and more.*

**Sean Keevey, Head of ICT, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

## A highly notable Digital Government Service Project

**Award Winning:** The Direct Payments Systems Project won in the Digital Excellence category at the 2016 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.

**Scale:** Over €1 billion of EU Direct Payments made to farmers in the first 3 months of system go-live

**Cost effective approach:** Version 1 deployed a small team, which achieved rapid implementation, leading to a highly cost effective approach for the customer.

**User Focus:** Improved customer experience through Internet portals helped ease the introduction of the complex new schemes and delivered 10% increase in online take-up in 2015.

**Improved Efficiency:** manual processing of paper based application forms by the Department was reduced by more than 20% in 2016.

**Collaborative approach:** The project ran without conflicts, focused on delivery and acted as a single IT team. We participated as required with on the Department's CAP Implementation Group, project

boards etc. The people involved were impressively dedicated and competent.

**Hit Every Milestone:** The incremental delivery and agile approach allowed key target dates to be met throughout the year despite continuously changing requirements. This allowed the maximum 70% advance payments to issue to the vast majority of farmers in October 2015, the earliest date permitted by the EU, and balancing payments to issue from December 1st, again the earliest permitted date. Only a small number of other member states made any advance payments.

**Improved Usability:** Improved internal system usability and the addition of new online processes has allowed improved efficiency and effectiveness. For example, the Quality Assurance processes for data entry and payments processing have all been brought online and have shortened user time required while improving process auditability.

**Responsive Design:** Re-Design of applications which are now much simpler to use and navigate than their predecessors, with modern look and feel through a responsive design with full cross-browser support accessible from a wide range of devices.



To find out how Version 1  
can transform your  
business, contact us:  
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