Delivering CAP Reform for 2015 and Beyond

VERSION 1

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) aims to promote sustainable economic growth and the development of the countryside.

The Department, as an accredited EU paying agency, oversees the application for and associated payment of over £230m worth of EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) funds, to 25,000 farm businesses in Northern Ireland.

Challenge

Reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the system of agricultural schemes and subsidies, began in 2015.

DAERA use an extensive number of IT systems to allow for application, validation, inspection, claim entitlement calculation and claim payment. The significant and fundamental legislative changes and subsequent change to the administration of CAP had to be reflected in DAERA's systems – to ensure DAERA could continue to receive and process applications and make payments in line with European legislation.

It was critical that DAERA met the obligations laid down by the EU, namely accurate and timely payments. To mitigate the risk in doing so, DAERA engaged Version 1 to drive the implementation of CAP Reform across all systems impacted by the change.

Solution

In developing these changes for CAP Reform, a team from Version 1:

- Contributed to the implementation of an IT Strategy to allow for the development, implementation, and support of new systems required as part of CAP Reform;

- Engaged at all levels within DAERA to introduce Agile principles across the Department, ensuring that these were adopted through all stages of solutions development and delivery;

- Supported the Programme Management function in reporting against key stage delivery, planning, risk, and issue management, and critical path development;

- Worked to identify and create components which could be reused across multiple systems

- Identified elements of existing systems that could be reused, and where this wasn't possible, developed new systems

- Developed and implemented new release, change management, and deployment planning guidelines and processes (as well as supporting software tools); and

- Continually worked with DAERA to assess, and where necessary refine, the delivery model as required.

Business and Technical Benefits

A key factor in the success of the project has been the Version 1 engagement model with DAERA. All Version 1 staff working on the project are fully integrated with DAERA staff in blended teams that encompass strategy and architecture, programme and project management, business analysis, software development, quality assurance, and release management.

This carefully tailored approach and engagement model has delivered a range of business and technical benefits to DAERA, including:

- Single ownership of the project outcome;

- All DAERA and Version 1 personnel are focused on managing the entire project, not their contribution to it;

- Ability for DAERA to quickly and easily flex its IT development capacity and capability in line with anticipated workload;

- Delivery of technical best practices developed by the Version 1 team across a range of industry sectors and customers; and

- n-built mentoring and knowledge transfer to ensure that these best practices are transferred to the DAERA team and deliver sustainable long-term benefits.

Real Differences, Delivered

Despite the challenges associated with the development of such a large number of complex and business-critical systems, the CAP Reform Programme has been incredibly successful for DAERA. All major business and legislative milestones have been met successfully. This included the launch of the online application (which is geo-spatially aided), systems to support claim validation checks, on-site and remote inspection, entitlement calculation, and payment.

The successful implementation of these systems has allowed DAERA to fully digitise its CAP application process, with the number of farm businesses using DAERA's online application system increasing steadily from 48% in 2015 to 100% in 2018. The personalised nature of the online application allows for validation and error checking based on each farm businesses individual circumstances. This has almost eliminated the need for manual back-office error checking and contributed to early and accurate payments. Since the launch of the reformed scheme in 2015, DAERA has paid over 95% of farm businesses their full payment by the end of each calendar year. This result far exceeds any other UK region.

The First UK Agency to offer Advanced Payments

In 2016, DAERA became the first, and to date, the only UK paying agency to offer advanced payments to farm businesses. DAERA has also managed to successfully embed the Agile methodology, allowing the teams to develop in a truly Agile environment. The Programme Management layer has provided the business and other stakeholders with the level of visibility and understanding required, to successfully complete such a large piece of work.
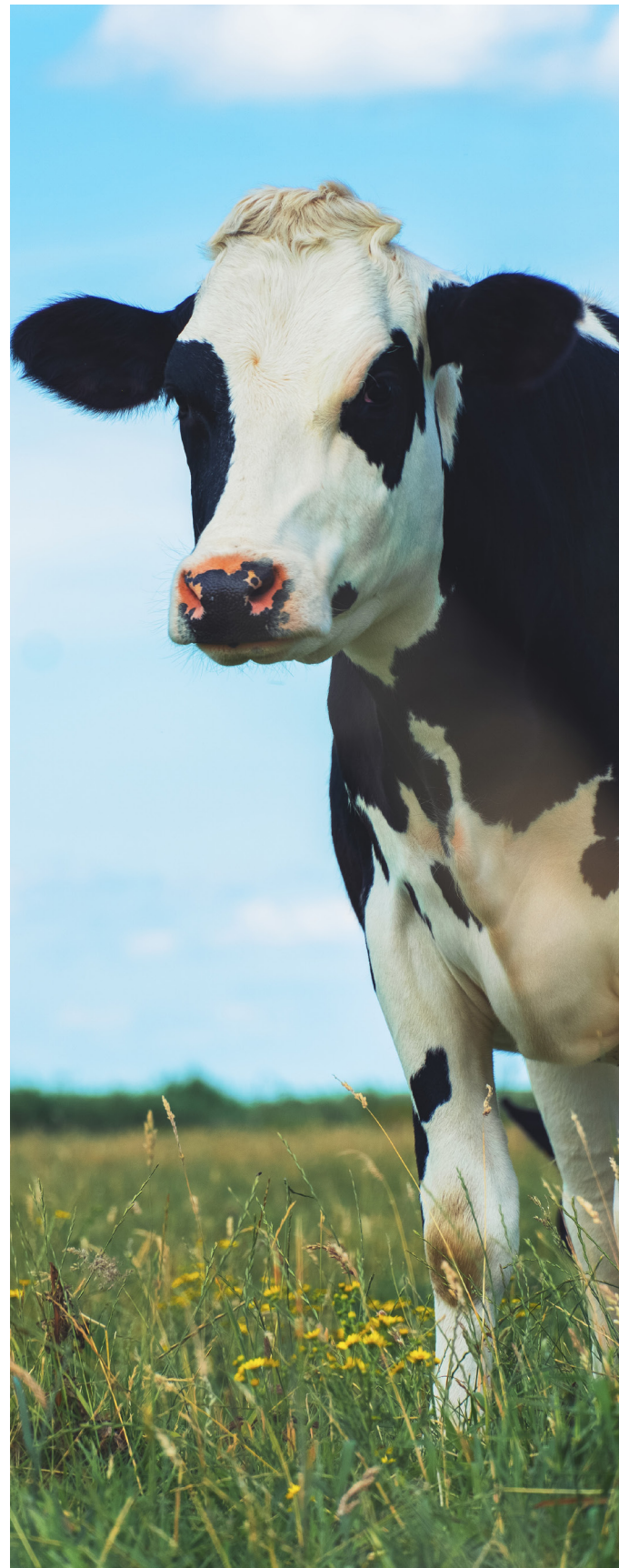
DAERA's internal team have also benefited from Version 1 coaching and knowledge share, both formally and as part of the Version 1 approach, working within and as part of the DAERA Agile development teams. The model implemented by DAERA is seen as an example for others to follow. DAERA have been shortlisted for a number of prestigious UK IT Industry awards as a result of this work and regularly facilitates visits from other government departments, who are keen to learn from the success of the DAERA CAP Reform Programme.

" *The team from Version 1 have made a significant and invaluable contribution to the delivery of the ICT systems that support CAP Reform in Northern Ireland. Their approach and delivery model allowed us to scale up our technical capacity and capability quickly in response to challenging timescales, and their seamless integration into the DAERA team meant that we could focus on delivering impressive results from the outset of the project.*

- Gerry Hackett, Head of Information Systems Unit, DAERA

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Transformation, contact us:

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