

Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board

Bringing ever greater process efficiency and effectiveness to the award of EU farming grants

THE CHALLENGE

The Estonian economy has changed dramatically since the 1990s. Agriculture remains an important contributor to the nation's overall economic health, with current output of more than €790 million. Estonian farming has experienced a significant transformation during those years, evolving from collective and state farms to small farms competing in European markets.

Many Estonian farmers secure European Union (EU) grants to reduce their financial burdens. Grant and payment rules change every year. For small businesses, delays in processing grant applications can have immediate consequences, such as: deferred farm equipment purchases, postponement of critical maintenance, or missed opportunities to enter new markets or enhance product yields.

Luckily, the nation's farmers are not alone in addressing the issue. The Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board (ARIB), a government agency working in the area of administration of the Ministry of Rural Affairs, implements EU agricultural market regulations, including the administration of farm and fishery subsidies. In 2004, ARIB began building TAKS, an integrated information system designed to speed processing and get subsidy payments into the hands of qualified applicants in a fast, efficient and accurate manner.

HOW CGI HELPED

ARIB turned to CGI for total lifecycle support with the TAKS program development. Major CGI tasks included:

- Systems analysis and business process change support
- Applications development and engineering
- Systems integration, database configuration and maintenance
- Applications management and maintenance
- Consultation, testing and training

Working together, ARIB and CGI produced a complete system used by 200 agency personnel to determine applicant eligibility, verify data submitted, calculate subsidies, process grant applications, and perform checks to control fraud and abuse, all while remaining compliant with constantly changing EU directives and new subsidy schemas. TAKS also became an early adopter of the X-Road open standard for secure data exchange (See box on next page.)

CASE STUDY

GOVERNMENT

Central and Federal Government

KEY BENEFITS

- Converting a paper-intensive grant application process into an integrated online system
- Complying with constantly changing EU directives and regulations
- Assuring the nation's farming sector of vital financial resources for steady growth

“CGI has been a true partner, positioning our agency and our larger agricultural community for success in a fast paced environment—today and in the years ahead.”

Ahti Bleive, Deputy Director responsible for EU direct subsidies, ARIB

X-Road compliance greatly facilitates the ability of authorized ARIB users to interact with other systems and registries.

RESULTS TO DATE

Today, TAKS supports 33,000 grant applications and direct payments of €180 million. It meets EU integrated administration and control system requirements and fully complies with EU agriculture regulations. With TAKS, Estonian farmers have greater confidence that their subsidy payments will be accurate and arrive on time.

System enhancements to TAKS are ongoing. Since its introduction, the system increasingly has moved the grant submittal process online, where 70% of subsidy applications are now submitted. This already has saved ARIB tens of thousands of work hours, allowing more time to focus on complex measures and eliminating the mistakes associated with manual processing. ARIB hopes to see the TAKS online submittal rate grow to 90% over the next few years.

The ARIB partnership with CGI has led to other important TAKS-related synergies, including creation of INSPIRE (the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community). INSPIRE enables access and exchange of land, agricultural and aquacultural related geographic data among stakeholders in Estonia and throughout the EU member states. Other collaborations have included a central client register, a milk quota system, and a data warehouse.

“CGI created an infrastructure for spatial information which benefits users as well as ARIB. Users can access the services through the ARIB registers (land parcels register, animal register) and check new spatial data whenever they like. It saves time and ARIB resources.”

Roman Belov, ARIB adviser
Direct Payments Software's and Geo-informatics Unit

Also helping to assure the continued transformation of Estonian agribusiness is EAGIS, a geographical information system used by ARIB to keep track of land parcels where subsidies are applied. CGI recently was awarded the application development and maintenance contract for EAGIS.

Making Inroads with X-Roads

X-Road is the backbone of e-Estonia. It is the invisible yet crucial environment that allows the nation's various e-services databases, both in the public and private sectors, to link up and operate in harmony. TAKS and other ARIB systems are connected to the X-Road interface. This enables efficient sharing and exchange of information with other X-Road users, including federal agencies, institutions and companies.

“We now administer a large number of rural and agricultural subsidies digitally, saving time for our farmers and for our payments agency. We are also able to make GIS data about fields and livestock buildings available to other Estonian or EU member agencies, scientists, students and journalists. These advances are helping to improve agriculture in Estonia and beyond.”

Ahti Bleive, Deputy Director
responsible for EU direct
subsidies, ARIB