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Government agency helps enable high-performance workplace through video.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada establish foundation for next generation workplace utilizing video and collaboration.



## Executive Summary

### Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Location: Departmental Headquarters and Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa; 170 regional offices spanning provinces and territories; research and production facilities across Canada and global communities

Number of Employees: 6,000

#### Challenge

- Connect a highly distributed, decentralized and mobile workforce
- Achieve priority results quicker
- Reduce travel expense and environmental impact
- Attract and retain best talent pool

#### Solution

- Cisco TelePresence Profile Series for dedicated meeting rooms
- Cisco TelePresence EX90 and Cisco Jabber for TelePresence to enable desktop and mobile videoconferencing
- Collaboration platform including instant messaging, hi-definition (HD) video and desktop sharing

#### Results

- Enhanced meeting experience with real-time Q&A, document sharing
- Ability to tap into global expertise; improved HR process efficiency
- Enriched team development and better decision making
- Significant reduction in travel expenses; travel request forms prompt team members to consider video first

## Challenge

When you're in the business of agriculture, there's no escaping the remote nature of the organization and the stakeholders with which you interact. At Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the federal government department responsible for supporting Canada's agriculture, agri-food and agri-based product sector, activities extend from central headquarters in Ottawa to 170 regional offices and numerous research facilities located across the country right down to farms, dams and food inspection lines.

AAFC's mandate is to provide information, innovation and policies necessary to achieve an environmentally sustainable and economically competitive sector, one that proactively manages risk while helping ensure the safety and security of Canada's food supply. To do so, the department relies

on a highly collaborative culture that allows scientists, researchers, industry members, policy makers, producers and growers to communicate effectively regardless of where in the country, or around the globe, they are located.

"Agriculture is a rural-based service that involves farming, production and widely distributed research," says AAFC CIO Peter Bruce, noting departmental teams are increasingly based in remote locations. "In order to work well together, we need an integrated organization where discussions and information sharing occur quickly," says Bruce.

Given their geographically dispersed nature, AAFC employees tended to spend a lot of time travelling to meet face-to-face with counterparts, resulting in long hours for executives, loss of productivity and high costs associated with travel and multi-day meetings.

AAFC wanted to keep its distributed, decentralized and highly-mobile workforce connected without relying on expensive and time-consuming travel, by fostering a collaborative environment consisting of unified technology solutions available to everyone. Its ultimate objective was to help enable an integrated organization where conversations happen quickly through a virtual "in person" environment that supports effective discussion and information sharing across its 6,000 employees and the global community of agriculture producers, processors, and consumers.

## Solution

In 2000, AAFC pioneered videoconferencing as a way to maintain virtual ties between 12 sites within one specific branch. Based on the success of the initial deployment, and utilizing the resulting lessons learned, AAFC's videoconferencing strategy continued to evolve to the point where it now has 110 small-to-medium-sized videoconferencing meeting rooms equipped across the country, as well as a handful of larger auditorium-sized rooms, all based on the Cisco® TelePresence® Profile Series. More recently, the department implemented a desktop strategy, rolling out 80 Cisco® TelePresence EX90 desktop units to executive offices and the first 100 of 500 planned Cisco Jabber™ Clients to help enable videoconferencing from a desktop, notebook or mobile device using Cisco Precision HD webcams and collaboration tools.

"Use of video as a communications tool is so pervasive you can't miss it," says Rama Rai, Director General, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Strategic Management Directorate.

"Even if you're a new employee who's never seen videoconferencing before, within one week of being here you'll be on a video call. Videoconferencing is the new norm."

Not only is video used to connect 30 or more sites for bi-monthly management meetings, but all staff meetings are held via videoconference, linking as many as 160 of AAFC's 170 regional offices simultaneously two to three times a year. Meetings are routinely scheduled by users who book rooms on an as-needed basis. According to metrics maintained by the videoconferencing support team, the department is averaging 70 minutes per videoconference meeting room per day, not accounting for the rowing use of desktop video.

From the start, adoption accelerated rapidly as users experienced firsthand the benefits of being able to collaborate across a vast organization of executive leadership, customer service centres, scientists, and field managers. What sets the AAFC video implementation apart is its reliance on a national service desk strategy. The centralized group is responsible for procuring and maintaining equipment, as well as providing a single point of contact.

The national service desk team is highly trained in Cisco technology and well equipped to troubleshoot any issues that may arise. Video communication is considered a managed service and all requests are funnelled through the service desk, which assigns technology depending on the type of user or room involved. "If we have a telepresence unit in a locked office accessible by only 20 people and we find they're not using it to sufficient levels to warrant a private office, we'll move it to a public one," says Rai.

Similarly, if a business unit is requesting videoconferencing but does not have the necessary bandwidth to support an implementation, the national service desk will co-ordinate with AAFC's network team to help ensure the bandwidth is in place prior to establishing a video presence. "We recognized with video, 'good enough' doesn't work," says Rai. "We wanted to deliver top-notch service and that required a dedicated team."

Along with all the benefits that come with the collaboration technology, AAFC gained key insights during the deployment experience itself, primarily within four capabilities. First and foremost, AAFC explored the best means of delivering integrated technologies in support of collaboration across the technology domains. Quality-of-service standards were developed during the process to support the necessary network and

solution bandwidth configuration, as well as the implementation of bridging technology to enhance the networking experience.

Second, new processes were designed, implemented, and adopted to support the deployment. For example, a number of support practices have been developed, such as video etiquette. Employees are coached in proper use of video behaviours and mannerisms, such as raising a hand to speak or repeating key points in both English and French. In addition, many self-service processes have been deployed as well as a new service request process, provided via the Help Desk to support future deployments.

Third, AAFC realized the increased use of video was changing the collaborative nature of the department and significantly increasing employee engagement. The new collaboration tools have made it easier for AAFC to evolve into the mainstream use of video across the organization, altering people's travel behaviours and the way they ultimately work together. This trend has driven enhanced engagement and collaboration and higher levels of productivity.

Finally, AAFC has learned that as collaborative technology changes workplace and employee behaviour, the workplace environment is evolving to support collaboration and is adopting the necessary collaborative space design. To help contain costs with the video deployment, AAFC is leveraging existing footprint and conference rooms with minor retrofits. As new building construction or floor/building retrofits occur, planning teams are now incorporating video and collaboration solution concepts into their footprint designs.

## Results

"Telepresence and videoconferencing are a vital part of our communications toolkit, enabling us to get on with business faster," says Bruce. "It allows our employees to establish trust in working relationships even though their counterparts are hundreds of kilometres away. With video, you can establish commitment, which is very difficult to do over the phone."

## Improved Meeting Experience

Now that AAFC team members are replacing traditional face-to-face meetings with virtual meetings, goals and issues are communicated more frequently to a broader audience. In general, video meetings are more productive and engaging compared to telephone meetings because attendees have the benefit of viewing behaviours and reactions.

"Telepresence gives everyone a seat around the table," says Bruce, who believes 80 percent

of communication is visual. "Conversations get to the heart of the matter faster with a quicker resolution compared to a phone chat."

In addition to sharing and reviewing documents in real time, participants in a telepresence session also have the added advantage of being able to review a recording at a later date.

## Increased Access to Best Talent Pool

For AAFC's Human Resources group, videoconferencing removes reliance on location. Faced with the challenge of replacing a retiring workforce, AAFC needs to tap into the expertise of a wide range of disciplines across Canada and the globe. Video technology is not only a cost-effective way to support the interview process, but it also helps enable AAFC to create a competitive environment more apt to attract and retain the best talent.

"When we need to hire someone, we're free to source from just about anywhere in Canada," says Bruce, adding that the next generation employee is starting to expect flexibility and mobility in the workplace. "It allows us to be agnostic about where they live and to focus more on their skills."

## Reduced Environmental Impact

Telepresence makes it possible for AAFC employees to meet in person without the damaging impact of travel. Rough estimates indicate the department has reduced its travel expense by at least 20 percent, but the real savings are found by choosing an environmentally friendly substitution for air and car travel, both of which harm the environment.

"Our travel request process includes a checkmark box asking employees if they've considered the use of video," says Bruce. "It's changing our workplace culture."

## Enhanced Priority Delivery

The true advantage of a collaborative workspace, supported by highly reliable video communications, is that AAFC employees are equipped to make things happen anywhere at any time, says Rai.

"There will always be a need to travel at some point, but using video increases the quality of our ongoing dialogue," she says. "If I need to call a meeting with two to three of my regional managers, in the past it would have been a telephone call. Today, we don't think twice; we go immediately to a group video meeting. We're building trusted relationships without the urge to travel, and that means we can set priorities faster."

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

A number of lessons learned during the deployment have led to AAFC adopting several best practices in the areas of technology capabilities, processes, organization and culture, and workplace. AAFC is benefitting from key learnings regarding network and infrastructure, sponsorship, roadmap and deployment plans, physical room setup, culture and user adoption, and support organization.

## Next Steps

AAFC has achieved mainstream use of video across its organization for formal meetings, informal touchpoints and even external engagements with industry groups, researchers and students. It continues to build on its strategy moving forward. Next steps include adding an integrated instant messaging solution to link to video and document sharing, the continued deployment of Cisco Jabber Client, a unified communications strategy including high-performance workplace collaboration, and increased use of self-scheduling and self-bridging.

"It isn't necessarily the size of our video implementation that makes us a leader; it's our approach," says Bruce, noting AAFC is a key contributor to the broader Government Video User Group community. "Everybody has a voice. Our business users are driving video because they know it's there when they need it."

## For More Information

For more information about Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, visit <http://www.agr.gc.ca>

For more information about the Accenture & Cisco Business Group, visit <http://www.acbg.com>

For more information about Cisco TelePresence Technology, visit: <http://www.cisco.com/go/telepresence>.

## Products

Cisco TelePresence Profile Series  
Cisco TelePresence EX90  
Cisco Jabber

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