



## Case Study

# Farm Credit Services of America And Frontier Farm Credit Cultivate a Fertile Business Future With the Data Management Maturity Model Assessment

### Company Background

Farm Credit Services of America (FCSAmerica) and Frontier Farm Credit — together, called “the Associations” — serve the agricultural credit, risk management, and financial needs of farmers and ranchers in Iowa, eastern Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Part of the national Farm Credit System of financial cooperatives, the Associations are owned by more than 60,000 farmer/rancher stockholders, have combined assets of more than \$27 billion, and employ about 1,800 people, more than 650 at corporate headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska.

### The Business Need

The Associations recognized that their growth strategy — and the future of their business — required a better understanding of data management. They turned to Sandhill Consultants for a CMMI Institute Data Management Maturity (DMM) assessment to create a means to prioritize investments and support strategic goals. The Associations also sought to better understand their unique business culture, including institutional strengths and challenges.

Of immediate concern to the Associations: A stable and collegial company culture with long staff tenure ensured easy access to institutional information, but irreplaceable institutional knowledge was warehoused with a few key employees, posing a severe business risk as the Associations faced inevitable company changes, staff turnover and retirements. Access and protection of vital business information depended on achieving greater data management competency — especially as the Associations evolve to meet the future needs of a changing business environment.

“The Data Management Maturity assessment conducted by Sandhill Consultants helped provide our organization with an effective roadmap to continue to leverage data as a corporate asset and provide greater confidence as we pursue data-centric strategic business objectives.”

**Mark Jensen, Chief Risk Officer, FCSAmerica and Frontier Farm Credit**

## The Solution

The Associations pursued a comprehensive data management assessment encompassing the entire Data Management Maturity Model (DMM). The assessment included data management strategy, data governance, data quality, data operations, platform and architecture, and supporting processes. Staff responsible for risk management, software development, security, program management and information technology participated in the DMM assessment process.

“We knew our company needed more data management focus — but we had never formally assessed ourselves,” said Rex Earl, Chief Security Office for FCSAmerica and Frontier Farm Credit. “Forming a cross-functional team and using its internal expertise as part of the DMM assessment enabled us to take a step back to assess our needs at a more strategic level and to focus our resources where they were needed for improvement.”

## Key Takeaways

**Gather key stakeholders together to evaluate capabilities** — including company leadership, senior-level managers, and key staff from both business and IT operations and management.

**Establish a common terminology** — establishing a shared company “glossary” based on the DMM terminology that precisely defines business terms and concepts to enable a common understanding of data management capabilities.

**Evaluate the current state of data management maturity** — assessing the Associations’ current status relative to key goals using the DMM model, and creating a roadmap for actionable data management improvements.

**Achieve alignment and agreement across the enterprise** — decoupling data management from enterprise management enables the Associations to shift from a “data-driven” business to the DMM model, in which data IS the business.

## The Results

The DMM assessment established a common understanding of the terminology that encompasses data management to ensure that interpretations closely match those employed in DMM framework. Extensive staff interviews and structured workshops provided a snapshot of the Associations’ data management capabilities, operationally and organizationally. This process revealed gaps, pockets of excellence, and improvement opportunities in ongoing data management practices and capabilities that resulted in specific recommendations and proposals to guide the company’s DMM evolution.

“The Sandhill assessment team asked thoughtful questions in a non-judgmental way, and worked patiently to help everyone understand the data management process,” Earl said. “Sandhill quickly translated data management principles to our business, and enabled our team to better understand our current capabilities versus the DMM level we could potentially achieve.”

The assessment also highlighted the need for a persistent leadership-driven effort to enhance data management capabilities to enable the Associations to embrace methodically the entire DMM framework at a program level, enterprise-wide. Gaining a clear understanding of the key steps needed to achieve the next level of data management maturity enables the Associations to respond more rapidly to market demands, as well as accommodate transformational changes to their future business environment.

## Lessons Learned

The DMM assessment was initiated to support efforts by the Associations to create a roadmap for upgrading their Enterprise Data Management (EDM) efforts. The resulting recommendations identified several other areas where organizational focus and applied resources could drive operational benefits.

The primary lesson learned from the assessment was the importance of having a defined data management program that is enterprise in scope and matures with the organization. The DMM framework enables work and associated priorities to be clearly defined.

“Organizations can only last so long without defining data as a key asset before they start to collapse under their own weight,” Earl said. “Using the DMM helps us create clear expectations and responsibilities, and preserve captured knowledge and our important data assets.”

The DMM assessment provided a roadmap that enables the Associations to further their organization’s strategic growth, and reduces the risk of critical business data and accumulated institutional knowledge being limited to a select few in the organization. The recommendations outlined a series of initiatives that provide quick wins, bridge gaps and support strategic initiatives.

“We have relied too heavily on a small number of expert team members to ‘know’ our data and understand the systematic impacts of a change. We needed a more process-oriented way of understanding and evaluating our data,” Earl said. “The DMM assessment provided us with an honest view of where our organization is today, and enables us to create and advocate for a prioritized path forward as the Associations strive to be agriculture’s most valued financial partner.”

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DMM  
Assessment

Organizations today seeking to evaluate and improve their data management are initiating a Data Management Maturity (DMM) process improvement model developed by the CMMI® Institute. A DMM assessment from Sandhill Consultants provides a common language and framework depicting what progress looks like in all of the fundamental disciplines of data management, and offers a graduated path to improvement tailored to an organization’s specific business strategies, strengths, and priorities.

Sandhill Consultants offers DMM assessments incorporating a strategy focused on improving an organization’s data management process. Sandhill’s DMM is the key to delivering an effective return-on-opportunity for data governance efforts, for delivering trusted and reliable data. DMM-certified professionals employ CMMI Institute’s proven method of facilitated evaluation through interviews and structured workshops that involves gathering a broad range of key stakeholders together to evaluate capabilities. Used in conjunction with the DMM model, this method enables an organization to quickly evaluate its current state of data management maturity relative to key goals, and achieve actionable immediate and strategic improvements to its data management program.

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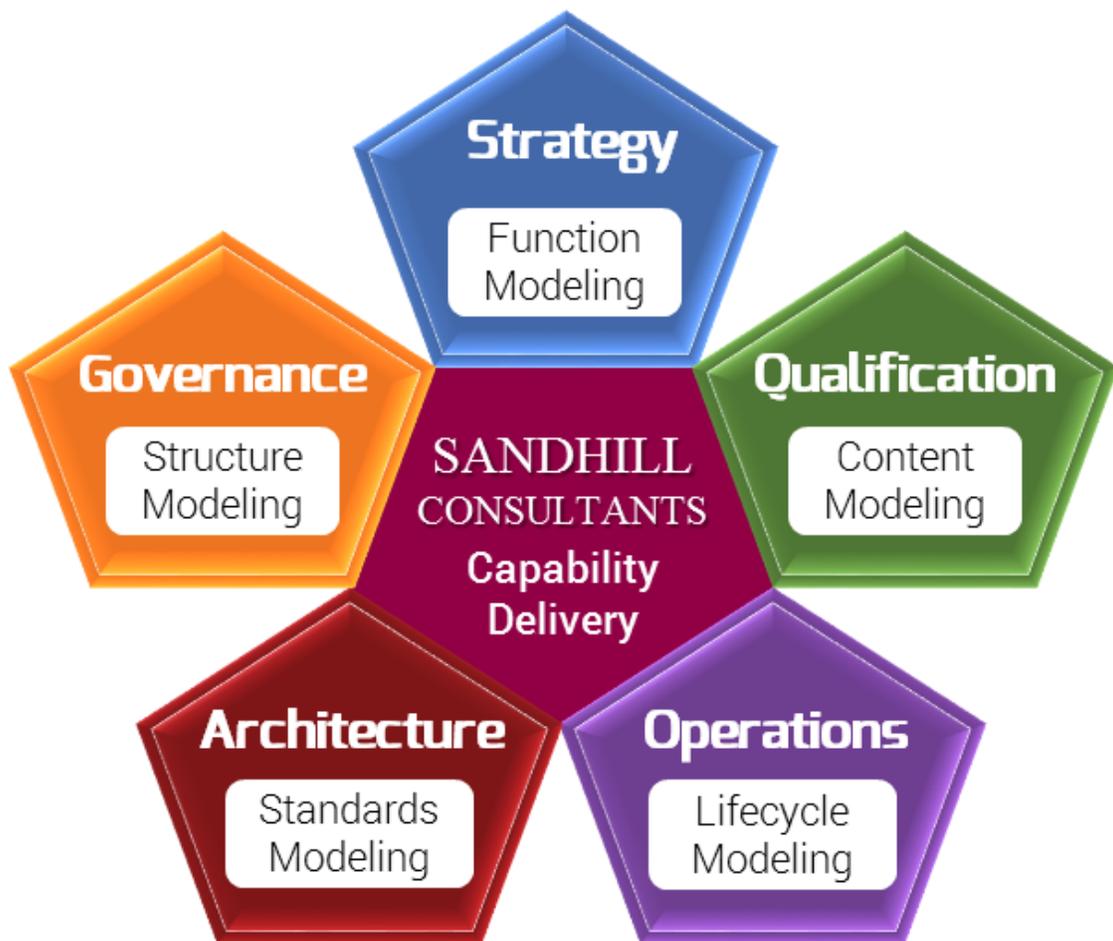
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resulting from a persistent Data Management Process

founded on a robust Data Governance Practice

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