



# Saskatchewan Wheat Pool reaps healthy harvest with e-business tools.

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**Application** Automated seed test tracking system; invoice calculation; electronic institutional memory

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**Business Benefits** Annual savings between \$300,000 and \$400,000, with risk management potential for millions; 10% to 15% increase in profitability; 100% to 600% est. ROI in one year; improved customer service; 133% increase in sample testing volume

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**Software** Lotus® Domino™  
Lotus Notes®

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**Business Partner** LGS Group Inc.

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While the transformation of seeds into fruitful bounties generally relies on human nurturing and help from Mother Nature, Canadian farmers have an additional resource to strengthen their odds of having a bountiful harvest—Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Established in 1924, the Pool is the country's top agricultural co-operative, with more than 70,000 members. At its seed quality testing lab in Saskatoon technicians and testers examine growers' samples for disease, germination potential and purity, certifying those that meet government standards.

*“One of the strengths of the Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino solution is its ability to handle complex processes ... Not only does this make a basic function like invoice preparation much more efficient, it also enables more effective reporting.”*

*—Harrison Webster, Program Manager for Workflow, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool*



Saskatchewan Wheat Pool keeps track of its seed quality tests with an automated solution based on Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino.

*It's about business, not just technology.*



*The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is providing faster seed testing results to customers thanks to its use of e-business.*

*“This [Lotus Notes and Domino] solution is demonstrating not only a staggering return on investment, but also adding value to the business process by helping us find new ways of getting and using mission-critical information.”*

*—Harrison Webster*

Business at Saskatoon has climbed steadily after two of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's testing facilities merged in September 1997. The two facilities had been handling up to 30,000 samples a year. However, it became apparent that the eight-year-old system the Pool was using for simple test tracking could no longer keep pace with the growth, creating backlogs and hampering customer service. To improve productivity and enhance service, the Pool's information technology (IT) staff sought an automated, Year 2000-compliant solution for seed test tracking. Working with Lotus Premium Partner LGS Group Inc., the IT staff created a workflow automation system using Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino, that enables lab technicians to enter (and track) seed sample and testing information into Lotus Notes databases, which are accessible through the company intranet.

The organization's new system, which handles a far larger volume of test samples per year—up to 70,000, compared with the previous system's 30,000—is already demonstrating its value in eliminating production backlog and improving customer service. In fact, the turnaround for testing certificates is so quick that many customers no longer need to request status reports. As a result, the organization has achieved a 15 to 20 percent reduction in call volume. And, when customers do call, they can get their answers right away.

To date, 90 percent of the lab's manual reporting has been automated by the system. As a result, managers can retrieve, using Lotus Notes, a wealth of information—from statistics on sample testing to data sorted by grower or seed type—for strategic planning and decision making.

“The results we've achieved using Lotus Notes and Domino, including an annual operating cost saving of Canadian \$300,000 to \$400,000 (U.S.\$200,000 to \$260,000), have far exceeded our expectations. This translates into a 10 to 15 percent increase in profitability,” notes Harrison Webster, program manager for workflow, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. “This solution is demonstrating not only a staggering return on investment, but also adding value to the business process by helping us find new ways of getting and using mission-critical information.” Says Arlen Olson, senior consultant with LGS Group: “We have provided Notes and Domino expertise to the Pool for the past two years. The seed test tracking system is another excellent example of a Notes application that provides a high return on investment.”

### **More testing, less searching**

Faster, less cumbersome processes mean that the Saskatoon lab is equipped to handle its increasing volume of test samples far more efficiently. The old system, designed for simple record keeping of test samples, worked in concert with a paper filing system. As samples arrived, lab technicians entered information on file cards and into their database. And each time samples went through different tests, technicians had to fill out new file cards. When customers called for status reports on their samples, technicians had to search through files for the appropriate cards—which meant that customers generally weren't able to get an answer until hours or even days later when all of their information was in place.

As the volume of business grew, the technicians found themselves putting in many extra hours just for routine housekeeping tasks, while a backlog of tests piled up. With the automated system, not only have they cleared the backlog, but eliminated the possibility of falling behind in the future. New samples can be categorized, appropriate tests conducted and the results tracked at each stage, without the need to reenter information time and again. "Now people know exactly what to do, where to go for the sample and obtain information on the results," explains Bob Whiting, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's manager of quality assurance. "Everything comes up on the screen for them. Before Notes and Domino, too much time was spent on door-to-door searches for data because test samples can be located in a number of areas within the lab."

### **Leveraging Lotus Notes and Domino investment**

Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and LGS Group selected IBM products for their solution because the Pool wanted to leverage its investment in Lotus Notes, which was already being used by several divisions for e-mail and groupware. Alongside the test tracking system, the organization has also launched several new applications at the Saskatoon lab to further enhance efficiency and staff productivity. Among these is an electronic institutional memory, whereby reference materials as well as information that previously existed only on paper or within employees' minds are now stored on the Lotus Notes database. "Now, we won't lose business-critical information if someone leaves the organization," says Webster. "This information is built into our system."

In another application, lab technicians are using their Lotus Notes-based system to calculate invoice fees for their customers. After testing data is entered for a sample, the system calculates the fee and stores this data in Lotus Notes. Previously, these invoices were calculated manually, with technicians searching through records of each test conducted for every sample. Under this system, the organization estimates it lost up to \$15,000 (Canadian) each year due to lost or misplaced information.

*"Our Notes- and Domino-based workflow automation system has provided us the ability to strengthen our leadership position, promote our services and really deliver on what we promise—prompt service and seed testing results."*

*—Bob Whiting, Manager of Quality Assurance, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool*



*Seed testers at Saskatchewan Wheat Pool handle tens of thousands of samples each year, tracking results using a workflow automation system.*

“One of the strengths of the Lotus Notes and Lotus Domino solution is its ability to handle complex processes, pulling together specific information scattered in different areas of the system,” says Webster. “Not only does this make a basic function like invoice preparation much more efficient, it also enables more effective reporting.”

### **Saving millions with risk management**

New risk management capabilities, made possible by the test tracking system, portend even greater savings. Because it deals with living organisms, the seed business can be very risky, so it's important to assess growth potential early on. Lotus Notes gives the Pool's seed marketing professionals quick, convenient access to information about the Pool's own seed products, which are tested at Saskatoon for certification and sold on the retail market.

Equipped with this information, the marketing staff can evaluate, in a timely manner, whether the seeds are marketable. In the past, the sales force relied on a binder stacked with paper spreadsheets containing the data. Often, by the time they found the right spreadsheets and determined whether or not the seed made the grade, it was too late to stop the sales process. “This poses a risk that can cost us customers. So, being able to eliminate such an improper sale can help us maintain our customer base and could save us millions of dollars a year,” notes Whiting.

### **Lotus Notes helps organization grow**

Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is projecting 100 percent return on investment for this project within a year. But the returns could come much sooner considering the risk management benefits. As Webster notes, “If we can reduce our risk by even 25 percent, then we've paid for this application five or six times in the first year.” What's more, the organization is confident that word about the improvements in customer service resulting from the new seed test tracking system will spread. Whiting says, “People are already talking about the seed lab and how happy they are with the results. This word-of-mouth advertising will help us grow.”

“Our Notes- and Domino-based workflow automation system has provided us the ability to strengthen our leadership position, promote our services and really deliver on what we promise—prompt service and seed testing results,” says Whiting. “It's part of our continuous improvement process, which has been very successful.”

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