MAP OF AG

Upgrading, upskilling & upping the ante

TEXEL
SHEEP SOCIETY

Project highlights

- Complete rebuild of the society's genetics and performance recording platform

- Agile project methodology with development work broken into 'sprint' cycles

- A move to a digital-first culture in how the society operates

- Improved service to members, upskilled staff and measurable savings in direct costs

- Future-proofed tool positioning the society for growth

- Increased member engagement in the creation of new feature ideas

Moving from an old and cumbersome database to a new system and digital-first approach has brought big benefits for the British Texel Sheep Society and set it on a pathway for growth.

The British Texel Sheep Society (TSS) along with its 2,500 members, is renowned for its major influence on the UK Sheep industry. It engaged Map of Ag's software development division Rezare Systems to completely rewrite its genetics and performance recording platform.

"Our grand challenge was to gain an understanding of how to redevelop or rewrite our database to fulfil our future needs, while limiting disruption to our member services during transition," says TSS CEO, John Yates.

To support the society with its objectives, Rezare undertook a detailed analysis and audit of their current system and presented a number of development options. In the end, TSS decided a greenfield build to create a truly robust and future-proofed tool for the society was the best route.

The new solution followed a "decoupled" architecture, allowing the back-end database to be separate from the front-end user interface, meaning upgrades and new developments could be more easily achieved without impacting other parts of the system.

"This was a major project for the society", Mr Yates adds. "It was the biggest single investment we have made, with the Society celebrating its 50th year in 2024, and vital to enable us to grow our offer and deliver what our members need now and in the future."

The society was keen to ensure there was a high level of technical competency to ensure the right level of database functionality was created to meet critical business needs. It was also essential there was a collegiate team both on the Rezare and society sides, and flexibility in project management and leadership.

"This was a complex project, combining political, technical and financial considerations, the main delivery of which was carried out over about 18 months," says Mr Yates. "There were some important things we had to adapt to, once we gained board sign off, such as working in an agile methodology. The society made its own investment in a project manager which, while adding cost, proved essential in gluing all the project deliverables together.

Upgrading, upskilling & upping the ante

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"We have future-proofed the business, improved access to information and created a platform for growth"

John Yates, Chief Executive, British Texel Sheep Society

"Other challenges included budget management – which was helped by breaking the project into manageable parts or 'sprints' and focusing on the minimal viable product before adding further features."

The project also created a great opportunity to review current processes and procedures and there was close consultation with staff over the future structure of the team, Mr Yates says. "Good communication and customer focus was essential."

The results have been impressive, Mr Yates explains. "Our new 'iTexel' solution has helped us to deliver an increased speed of change of behaviour among our membership to self-help data input, which has reduced the need for basic admin support, allowing our small team to focus on new service development.

Our overhaul of admin procedures has centred on a digital-first culture and allowed us to consolidate our team while upskilling to provide increased quality of service. We have cut paper and mailing costs, with efficiencies created by integrating the system via APIs with cloud services such as Gocardless and Xero."

The feedback from the society's membership has been hugely positive, Mr Yates confirms. "We are generating new ideas for further development off the back of the investment. My life and that of the team and the general membership is so much easier today than it was in the past. I only get compliments not criticisms about iTexel, particularly important in a membership organisation. We have future-proofed the business, improved member access to information and satisfaction, and created a platform for growth."

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