



Agriculture and  
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et  
Agroalimentaire Canada



# Audit of the Winnipeg Contact Centre

June 2, 2017

The AAFC Audit Committee recommended this audit report for approval by the Deputy Minister on June 2, 2017.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Winnipeg Contact Centre is managed by the Farm Income Programs Directorate (FIPD) within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). This is a centralized contact centre that provided information on selected programs and services via telephone to 37,491 external clients in January to December 2016.

The Audit of the Winnipeg Contact Centre was approved as part of the Risk-Based Audit Plan for Fiscal Year 2016-2017. The audit objective was to provide assurance on the adequacy of management practices currently in place at the Winnipeg Contact Centre.

The audit concluded that adequate management practices were in place at the Winnipeg Contact Centre. In particular, the audit noted the following good management practices:

- The monitoring of performance against established service standards and performance metrics, and reporting on results to both internal and external clients;
- The development and implementation of a structured training program for new Information Officers and ongoing training and coaching under the Quality Assurance Program; and
- The development of a three-year plan to seek client feedback on service delivery to identify areas to improve service.

There were no issues identified based on the audit work conducted, therefore no recommendations are provided in this report.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

**1.1.1** The delivery of services is an important focus of the government and is influenced by several evolving policy and framework drivers. These include:

- **Treasury Board Policy on Service** – Sets the strategic direction for client-centric service in the Government of Canada that aims to realize efficiencies and promote a culture of service management excellence. This policy is currently being updated.
- **Treasury Board Policy on Transfer Payments** – The objective of this policy is to ensure well-managed transfer payment programs that are citizen- and recipient-focused. This policy is currently being updated.
- **Management Accountability Framework** – Sets out the Government of Canada vision for a well-managed organization, and includes an element on citizen-focused service.
- **Results and Delivery Agenda** – Defines a results and delivery approach for Government of Canada activities, including a culture of measurement and impact.

**1.1.2** Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) developed a Service Strategy for 2013-2018, aligned with the timing of the Growing Forward 2 agricultural policy framework. This strategy was developed to support the agricultural sector's complex needs, the departmental mandate, and the evolving policy and service transformation occurring within the department and the government as a whole.

**1.1.3** The Service Strategy articulates the vision for citizen-centred responsive programs and services. As a federal government department, AAFC deals directly with the public in a variety of ways, including:

- **Direct contact with programs:** Program clients are in direct contact with program officers in the various transfer payment programs operated by the department.
- **Physical mail:** Responding to clients via physical mail and operates several mail processing sites.
- **External web site:** Maintaining an external web site, providing program and service information to clients, with approximately 4.4 million external visitors between January to December 2016.
- **Toll-free numbers:** Operating toll-free numbers including numbers for general inquiries, and specialized services like media relations, the collections unit, and Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP), as well as the Winnipeg Contact Centre.

## 2.0 THE WINNIPEG CONTACT CENTRE

**2.1.1** The focus of this audit was on the Winnipeg Contact Centre (referred to as the Contact Centre in this document), which is a centralized contact centre that provided program and service information to 37,491 callers in January to December 2016.

**2.1.2** The Programs Branch Farm Income Programs Directorate (FIPD) operates the Contact Centre which employs 12 information officers, two team managers, and one manager.

**Table: Call Data for the Contact Centre<sup>1</sup>**

Program / Area	January to December 2016	
	# of Calls	Percent
<b>Farm Income Programs Directorate:</b>		
AgriInvest	27,213	72.59%
AgriStability	5,109	13.63%
<b>Other Programs:</b>		
AgriCompetitiveness	13	0.03%
AgriInnovation	376	1.00%
AgriMarketing	259	0.69%
AgriRisk	30	0.08%
Advance Payments Program	179	0.48%
Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program	55	0.15%
Career Focus	181	0.48%
<b>Other Inquiries:</b>		
General Growing Forward 2	597	1.59%
MyAccount	199	0.53%
Non-Program Specific	3,280	8.75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,491</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**2.1.3** Service support provided by the Contact Centre is defined by tier level, as follows:

- **Tier 1 (general inquiry):** An inquiry that is not specific to any single application. It does not require the authentication of a client, and no personal information is accessed or shared.
- **Tier 2 (client specific):** An inquiry that requires the authentication of a client and personal information may be shared or accessed. For AgriInvest & AgriStability,

<sup>1</sup> Call data was provided by the Contact Centre

these calls are managed by Contact Centre Information Officers. For non-FIPD programs, this type of call is escalated to the responsible program area for response.

- **Tier 3 (complex):** These inquiries require in-depth analysis prior to providing direction to a program participant. A Tier 3 call may require the authentication of a client and personal information may be shared or accessed. This type of call requires information or investigation from the responsible program area.

**2.1.4** The Contact Centre responds to Tier 1 and Tier 2 level inquiries for AgriStability and AgrilInvest, and provides Tier 1 level support for the non-FIPD programs delivered by the Programs Branch that have been on-boarded to the Contact Centre. The Contact Centre also supports the AgrilInvest internet portal, as well as the online form for the Grants and Contributions Delivery System.

**2.1.5** The total calls answered in 2016 were 37,491 of which 86% related to the two FIPD programs: AgrilInvest and AgriStability. The remaining 14% of calls related to all other on-boarded non-FIPD programs, services like MyAccount or general inquiries.

**Table: Contact Centre Expenditures<sup>2</sup>**

Item	2015-2016	2016-2017
Full Time Equivalent Salary	\$740,988	\$743,498
Non-Pay Operating	\$19,453	\$3,462
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$760,441</b>	<b>\$746,960</b>

**2.1.6** This audit was approved as part of the Risk-Based Audit Plan for Fiscal Year 2016-2017.

### **3.0 AUDIT OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE**

#### **Audit Objective**

**3.1.1** The audit objective was to provide assurance on the adequacy of management practices of the Winnipeg Contact Centre.

#### **Audit Scope**

**3.1.2** The audit focused on practices within the Contact Centre, for the criteria identified in Annex A. To focus on practices currently in place, the audit tests assessed information from the most recent calendar or fiscal year, depending on the availability of the data. In some cases, the audit team deemed it relevant to assess data incorporating earlier years as specified in the report. The audit included other supporting units within Programs Branch, to the extent that they were involved in the operations of the Contact Centre.

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<sup>2</sup> Expenditures data provided by the Contact Centre. Two years of data are provided to allow for comparison.

## 4.0 AUDIT APPROACH

**4.1.1** The audit approach and methodology were risk-based and consistent with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* and the *Internal Auditing Standards for the Government of Canada*, as required under the Treasury Board *Policy on Internal Audit*. These standards require that the audit be planned and performed so as to conclude against the objective. The audit was conducted in accordance with an audit program that defined audit tasks to be performed in the assessment of each line of enquiry.

**4.1.2** Audit evidence was gathered through various methods including interviews, and the review and analysis of documentation.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

**5.1.1** The audit concluded that adequate management practices are in place at the Winnipeg Contact Centre. In particular, the audit noted the following good management practices:

- The monitoring of performance against established service standards and performance metrics, and reporting on results to both internal and external clients;
- The development and implementation of a structured training program for new Information Officers and ongoing training and coaching under the Quality Assurance Program; and
- The development of a three-year plan to seek client feedback on service delivery to identify areas to improve service.

## 6.0 STATEMENT OF CONFORMANCE

**6.1.1** In the professional judgment of the Chief Audit Executive, sufficient and appropriate audit procedures have been conducted and evidence gathered to support the accuracy of the conclusion provided and contained in this report. The conclusion is based on a comparison of the conditions, as they existed at the time of the audit, against pre-established audit criteria that were agreed on with management. The conclusion is applicable only to the entity examined.

**6.1.2** This audit was conducted in accordance with the *Internal Auditing Standards for the Government of Canada*, as supported by the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Program.



## DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

The following sections present the key observations, based on the evidence and analysis associated with the audit.

There were no issues identified based on the audit work conducted, therefore no recommendations are provided in this report.

## SECTION 1 - CLIENT-FOCUSED SERVICE

### 7.0 ESTABLISHMENT OF SERVICE STANDARDS

**7.1.1** The Treasury Board *Guidelines on Service Standards* notes that service standards are integral to good client services and to effectively managing performance. They help clarify expectations for clients and employees, drive service improvement, and contribute to results-based management.

**7.1.2** The audit conducted interviews and examined documentation to determine if service standards were established for the Contact Centre.

**7.1.3** The audit found that the Contact Centre has established a formal service standard to answer 90 percent of all calls within 60 seconds. The service standard was established based on research in the private and public sector, as well as the behavior of clients and their willingness to hold. The Contact Centre reviewed its service standard in February 2016 and has plans to further assess it following a client survey that was launched in March 2017. At the time this audit report was being developed, the Contact Centre was in the process of analyzing the client survey results.

**7.1.4** Section 2 provides information on service standards results and monitoring and reporting.

### 8.0 MECHANISMS TO ENSURE QUALITY OF SERVICE

To assess the processes and practices in place to ensure quality of service, the audit team reviewed the key risk areas identified during the audit's planning phase, specifically:

- Availability of Bilingual Information Officers;
- Client authentication;
- Training program and coaching provided to Information Officers; and
- Knowledge materials for Information Officers.

## Availability of Bilingual Information Officers

**8.1.1** The Treasury Board *Policy on Official Languages* requires that bilingual offices communicate with and provide services to members of the public in the official language chosen by the member of the public.

**8.1.2** The audit team reviewed staff scheduling records and documentation on staffing actions, as well as interviewed Contact Centre management, to determine if mechanisms are in place to ensure the availability of bilingual Information Officers.

**8.1.3** The audit team reviewed the Contact Centre schedules and confirmed that bilingual staff were scheduled for all operating hours of the Contact Centre in 2015-2016. The audit requested information on official language complaints for the past three fiscal years in order to determine if current management practices were adequate. Internal Audit confirmed that no official languages complaints were received during the previous three fiscal years, up to the time of audit testing (2014-2015 to February 2017).

**8.1.4** Management stated that current staffing resource levels for the Contact Centre are appropriate although attracting and retaining bilingual staff remains an ongoing challenge due to the high demand for bilingual call agents in both the public and private sector in Winnipeg. Management advised that they are actively recruiting bilingual staff through a variety of staffing strategies, including adopting a “continuous inventory” approach to allow for an on-going receipt of applications with no cut-off date with the goal of attracting more candidates.

## Client Authentication

**8.1.5** Client authentication refers to the process of verifying the identity of a caller prior to releasing private information. Under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*, staff should be trained on privacy policies and practices and be aware of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of personal information.

**8.1.6** To assess whether management has established controls to ensure that client authentication is performed, the audit team conducted interviews and examined documentation supporting the call authentication processes.

**8.1.7** The Contact Centre’s authentication procedures are outlined in the FIPD Administration Manual, which is provided to Information Officers. The audit observed that the Contact Centre has mechanisms in place to ensure that Information Officers authenticate callers. Specifically it:

- Identified its sensitive information holdings to determine what information needs to be protected;

- Developed client authentication processes to reduce the risk of inappropriate release of information;
- Trained Information Officers on client authentication procedures; and
- Monitored call quality, including client authentication, through its Quality Assurance Program.

In addition, in Fall 2016, the Contact Centre reviewed the alignment of its call authentication procedures with the Canada Revenue Agency call authentication procedures to ensure consistency in how verifications are performed.

## Training Program and Coaching

**8.1.8** The Treasury Board *Policy on Service* requires that learning opportunities regarding service-related knowledge and client-service excellence are given to service providers at the commencement of employment and on a regular basis. To assess this, the audit team reviewed the Information Officer training records and a sample of training material.

**8.1.9** The audit found that there is a structured training program in place for Information Officers at the beginning of employment. This training includes general phone etiquette, caller authentication, public service principles (e.g. ATIP, information management, etc.) and on AAFC program specifics. The program also includes three days of training on service excellence. The audit team also reviewed staff training records and interviewed the trainers and confirmed that additional training is provided on program and system updates on an ongoing basis.

**8.1.10** Through the formal Quality Assurance Program, initiated in 2016-2017, clients are informed that calls are recorded for training purposes. Team Managers review recordings and provide Information Officers with coaching to maintain and enhance the quality of service delivered to clients.

## Knowledge Materials for Information Officers

**8.1.11** To provide accurate information to clients, the Information Officers require access to accurate and up-to-date program and departmental information.

**8.1.12** To assess if practices were in place to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is available for Information Officers, the audit team interviewed staff and management within the Contact Centre, the Technical Communications Unit and on-boarded programs. Relevant manuals and material used to update program information were also reviewed.

**8.1.13** An electronic manual of procedures on the FIPD programs AgriInvest and AgriStabilty is used by the Contact Centre. These manuals are prepared and regularly updated by the Technical Communications Unit within FIPD.

**8.1.14** The Information Officers use an evergreen knowledge repository that is maintained in the electronic Service Delivery Support Suite. This information is presented in a question and answer format, organized by program. The initial knowledge elements were prepared by the programs and provided to the Contact Centre. Program managers are responsible for ensuring that program knowledge elements are updated as needed. The audit team noted that the Contact Centre has practices in place to obtain an annual review and update of program information.

**8.1.15** In addition, the audit found that the Contact Centre has practices in place to ensure that correct and current information for the programs supported by the Contact Centre is available to Information Officers.

## **9.0 CLIENT NEEDS AND FEEDBACK**

**9.1.1** The Treasury Board *Policy on Service* notes that clients expect effective services that are integrated, simple, timely and secure. To meet these expectations, consideration must be given to the needs and feedback of clients and the implementation of strong service management practices.

**9.1.2** To assess the practices in place within the Contact Centre to obtain client feedback, the audit team conducted interviews with the Contact Centre and program managers and reviewed relevant documentation, including plans for client engagement.

**9.1.3** The audit noted that the Farm Income Programs Directorate (FIPD) has drafted a Client Engagement Plan which outlines a plan to formally capture client feedback on service delivery. This plan articulates five streams of client engagement: (1) annual client satisfaction surveys, (2) a thematic public opinion research approach, (3) analysis of existing client feedback data, (4) the introduction of an employee service delivery survey, and (5) client journey mapping. As at the time of audit reporting in May 2017, the draft engagement plan was developed and awaiting formal review and approval.

**9.1.4** Contact Centre management also informed the audit team that they encourage staff to provide their input on how to improve the client experience with the Contact Centre. In addition, employee feedback is obtained through staff polls and staff participation in operational working groups.

## **SECTION 2 - MONITORING PERFORMANCE**

### **10.0 DATA AND REPORTING**

**10.1.1** The Treasury Board *Guideline on Service Management* notes that most leading organizations establish performance metrics related to client service (for example,

response times, number of rings) and collect data to monitor their own performance. Evaluating service standard performance data determines organizational strengths and weaknesses, identifies progress, and sets priorities for future action. Furthermore, the *Policy on Service* requires that service standard information be available on the external web site for external clients.

**10.1.2** The audit team conducted interviews and reviewed relevant documentation, including sample performance reports and service standard reports, to assess performance data monitoring and reporting.

**10.1.3** As noted in Section 1 of this report, the Contact Centre has established a service standard to answer 90% of calls within 60 seconds. In addition, the audit observed that the Contact Centre established internal performance indicators related to operational metrics such as total call volume, total calls answered, wait time, and average talk time. The audit found that appropriate data was available to monitor performance against the service standard and performance indicators.

**10.1.4** Performance results are reported to internal stakeholders in weekly statistical reports, comparing the current week to year-to-date results. The Contact Centre also completes a quarterly analysis of enquiries received to assess the nature of calls including call tier level, capture changes to knowledge elements for Information Officers, and identify opportunities to improve client service.

**10.1.5** The audit confirmed that the Contact Centre regularly reports its service standard results to external clients on the departmental web site. The Contact Centre surpassed the service standard in 2015, 2016, and for the period of January to March 2017.

<b>2015-2017 Service Standard Results – External Reporting</b> Percent of calls answered within 60 seconds:	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number Calls Received</b>
<b>2015 (January to December)</b>	97.5%	40,759
<b>2016 (January to December)</b>	97.5%	38,726
<b>2017 (January to March)</b>	94.5%	9,691

## **ANNEX A: AUDIT CRITERIA**

### **1.0 LINE OF ENQUIRY 1 - CLIENT-FOCUSED SERVICE**

- Appropriate client service standards for the Contact Centre were established.
- Mechanisms were in place to ensure consistent and quality service.
- Mechanisms were in place to obtain and act on client feedback to make service improvements.

### **2.0 LINE OF ENQUIRY 2 – MONITORING PERFORMANCE**

- Appropriate data was available to monitor performance and service standards.
- Performance data and service standards were reported to management and used to support decision-making.

## **ANNEX B: ACRONYMS**

AAFC	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
ATIP	Access to Information and Privacy
FIPD	Farm Income Programs Directorate