

## Farm Credit Organizations Capitalize on Information Sharing Tools



Across Farm Credit, organizations are employing powerful digital platforms to enhance internal communication flow and support collaboration, often across multiple locations and to include remote employees.

Workplace is the tool of choice for several Farm Credit groups including FCC Services, which launched the platform last year. Workplace is a Facebook product that enables an organization to create a protected organization-specific social media site that is unconnected to employees' personal Facebook pages, but operates in a similar fashion: members of the organization can post updates, including photos and videos, and respond to others' posts.

FCC Services has replaced its intranet with Workplace, so the new platform is the main tool for internal information sharing. Senior leaders are actively engaged, giving the entire employee team insight into their priorities and personalities. They're also using Workplace Live Video so employees who aren't in the office for a particular meeting or event can watch either live or later at their convenience.

"We're using it as a way to share information and to enhance our communication, connection and culture, especially for new employees and those who work outside of our main office," says Stephanie Barton, Vice President of Marketing and Affinity Programs with FCC Services. "We've found that our employees are comfortable sharing on Workplace, and it's helping build a more collaborative spirit across our organization. This is especially important given how often our consultants are on the road working with clients."

To encourage adoption, FCC Services undertook an internal communications campaign that covered best practices, human resource concerns and suggestions on how employees could use the platform. The campaign resulted in 100% adoption, with employees now regularly posting everything from photos from client meetings to volunteer work to weddings and new babies.

"Although it's an online tool, Workplace has actually enhanced our face-to-face culture as employees feel more connected to each other," Stephanie says. "It's also helped support some of our organizational initiatives, such as our team wellness 'competition' last year."

Texas Farm Credit also implemented Workplace, in large part because it enables active engagement among its employees, including leaving comments and asking questions on posts or during live events. This is especially important as the organization's territory is spread across 100 counties.

"It would take 10 hours to drive between our two most distant branches, and Workplace offers a hub where we can bring everyone together virtually, which is the only way we can all connect regularly," says Kacy Land, Communications Director for Texas Farm Credit. "It's helping enhance our company culture and increase engagement, especially for our employees in small, remote offices."

Organizational posts share association news, spotlight community involvement and deliver individual or team accolades. Texas Farm Credit also uses Workplace to house files and training, such as videos on email etiquette. Twice a year, the platform supports a live-stream senior management meeting with employee questions asked and answered in real-time. Individual posts can include the personal as well as things like employee and team spotlights, links to industry news articles, and also often include job-related photos from loan officers and appraisers out in the field.

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“The feedback has been very positive, especially from employees who don’t often get to see the amazing things we do for our customers,” says Kacy. “The posts from the field help employees in the office feel more connected to our mission and how it’s being enacted in the real world.”

As on Facebook, Workplace users are able to create subgroups for teams or projects. At Texas Farm Credit, any employee can create a group for any purpose. As examples, there is a Social group to share personal activities and events, and there is a Loan Administrators group where those employees can ask each other questions and get advice on their specific area of focus.

Like FCC Services, Texas Farm Credit launched Workplace with an internal communications campaign to establish policies and encourage adoption. The internal communications tools developed by both organizations are available to other Farm Credit entities considering implementing Workplace.

In a broader application, Workplace has also been implemented by the Farm Credit Council to support collaboration among professional communicators across all of the System’s organizations. Launched in 2017, the Council’s Workplace enables information sharing and exchanging, including topical discussions on specific communications situations. The Council also uses it for ad hoc surveys on different topics.

“We’d been looking for a tool to share information quickly to Farm Credit communicators across the country, and recognized Workplace offered a secure and private solution,” says Debbie Wing, Executive Vice President of Communication for the Farm Credit Council. “Our group is highly engaged on the platform, so any Farm Credit communicator can post a question and quickly get suggestions and advice from Farm Credit colleagues who have faced similar challenges. Our goal is to increase coordination and collaboration.”

Farm Credit Services of America is using a different tool to achieve its communication and collaboration goals, building a custom intranet on the SharePoint platform with the most recent update going live two years ago. The intranet, branded Access America, reaches every employee as the home page when they access the web. The home page includes access to key information including links to the most-used sites and the corporate directory, live social media feeds, and FCSAmerica’s external blog so people can keep up with what’s being shared externally.

Access America also engages employees through daily news articles, some stemming from organizational activities, announcements and achievements, but many coming from employees throughout the organization. This daily update keeps employees engaged with the platform, and also builds a sense of connection. Access America is also used as a collaboration tool where functional departments, work groups and cross-functional teams can establish group sites to share files, timelines and milestones.

“We have 48 retail offices plus our headquarters, so Access America is essential in helping us all stay connected to each other and the organization, and helps facilitate the work we do,” says Debbie Mell, Internal Communications Manager.

Whatever the platform, the power and effectiveness of available technology to enhance communication, culture and collaboration is a boon to today’s organizations, says Stephanie. “Having the right information makes it easier for people to do their jobs, serve their customers and contribute to the organization’s success,” she says.