Alfresco and Armedia Modernize Operations at USDA Food and Nutrition Service

Centralized document and records management increases efficiency, collaboration, and compliance, streamlining management of the agency's lifesaving programs

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is a USDA agency that partners with public, private, and non-profit organizations to reduce hunger and increase food security. The agency's roughly $100B annual budget supports 15 federally funded nutrition assistance programs that touch the lives of one in four Americans.

FNS leverages the Alfresco Digital Business Platform to improve the performance, efficiency, and integrity of program administration. The platform is a critical part of the agency's operations. Two-thirds of FNS's 1,500 employees use Alfresco's centralized document and records management capabilities to work more efficiently and collaboratively.

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Modernization Was a Priority

The Alfresco platform was implemented in 2012 by [Armedia](), an award-winning systems integrator that specializes in digital transformation for government agencies. At the time, FNS had a lot of paper-based processes and siloed ECM systems that were a barrier to the fast, effective management of its nutrition assistance programs.

The FNS CIO wanted to modernize the agency's operations and IT infrastructure using a platform-based approach. "There was a growing interest across the agency to automate processes and establish a platform-based approach for managing documents and records that would benefit various FNS programs," says James Bailey, Armedia President and CEO.

Unified Platform Supports Transformation

FNS selected Alfresco as the foundation for this unified IT strategy. The platform provides tightly integrated content, process, and governance capabilities which are readily accessible in the USDA Cloud.

As an Alfresco Strategic partner and three-time Alfresco Federal Partner of the Year awardee, Armedia has leveraged Alfresco in multiple modernization initiatives at FNS, using the platform to consolidate document management, implement electronic recordkeeping, support office hygiene initiatives, and digitize manual workflows. As of Spring 2020, five applications—three of them built by Armedia—integrate with the Alfresco platform. Together, these systems have helped transform the management of FNS's lifesaving programs supporting their abilty to, "Do Right and Feed Everyone."

Streamlined Collaboration with Partners

For starters, FNS has streamlined how it authorizes, monitors, and exchanges information with partners and program participants.

Armedia developed the Management Evaluation Management System (MEMS) supporting 13 different programs to provide faster approval and better tracking of regional programs. A new Retailer File System (RFS) simplifies the electronic capture and management of retailer data from state agencies and suppliers. Both systems leverage Alfresco to promote the effective use of program benefits in collaboration with FNS partners.

Faster, More Informed Decisions

Another FNS goal has been to increase operating efficiency by making information easier for agency staff members to access and act on. An Alfresco-based research tool, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) Policy Wiki, reduced the time required to find relevant policy guidelines from weeks to mere minutes. "The tool is saving a significant amount of staff time, enabling work to be done more efficiently," says Francis Heil, retired Senior Technical Advisor of USDA FNS SNAP Policy.

FNS achieved similar efficiency gains by integrating its ALERT fraud detection system with Alfresco. Fraud cases now close faster because investigators can quickly see and securely share all case documents.

Transition to Electronic Records

Alfresco provides a modern records management solution in support of the 2022 deadline set out in M-19-21, Transition to Electronic Records. Armedia has overseen several office hygiene projects at FNS that involve digitizing boxes full of paper records, which are then stored and automatically managed by Alfresco in compliance with agency rules.

The move to electronic records has the added benefit of freeing up office space, enabling remote work, ensuring continuity of operations, and capturing the historical knowledge of an aging workforce.

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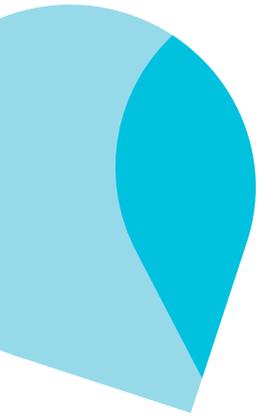
Partner in Innovation

Armedia has been closely involved in FNS's modernization efforts since deploying Alfresco in 2012. "As FNS partners, we've helped FNS executives think through new initiatives and the technologies they want to bring into the enterprise," says Bailey.

Armedia has played a key role across the software development lifecycle, from needs analysis and user interface design; through development, testing, and integration; to training and support. The Armedia team also provided expertise in cloud migration, Agile methodologies, and DevSecOps.

Open Enterprise Platform

Bailey says Alfresco has many strengths as an agency-wide solution starting with, "an open architecture and open APIs that make it easy to integrate with custom and third-party applications."
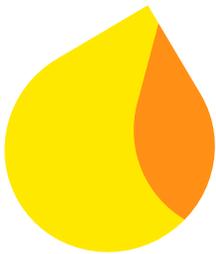
He also points to advantages like Alfresco's scalability, sophisticated security controls, DoD 5015-compliant records management, and alignment with government initiatives to use open source software (M-16-21) and cloud services (M-16-19). Another plus: The Alfresco Application Development Framework (ADF) accelerates the delivery of custom user experiences.

More Modernization Ahead

Over the course of eight years, Armedia has helped FNS strengthen collaboration, compliance, and efficiency with a unified platform that meets multiple document and records management needs. Looking ahead, Bailey sees opportunities for FNS to further leverage its Alfresco investment as well as new platform capabilities like artificial intelligence (AI) services and advanced eDiscovery support.

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Francis Heil
Retired Senior Technical Advisor
USDA FNS

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