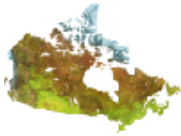




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Farmers Harvest the Benefits of GeoConnections

By [Rob Parkinson](#)

GeoConnections projects regularly bring the ESS S&T Strategy directly into communities to enhance planning and management decisions by diverse users. Map Your Farm is just one of many such projects, displaying the partnerships, leadership, innovation, efficiency, outputs and outcomes that exemplify what the S&T Strategy is all about.

GeoConnections became acquainted with Map Your Farm about a year and a half ago, when GeoConnections posted an invitation to submit letters of interest from organizations and agencies that would like to take advantage of what the program has to offer. Several dozen sent in letters, including Oxford County.

Following a review of the letters of interest, GeoConnections invited Oxford County to submit a proposal and worked closely with county officials to help them develop a viable project plan. "When we invite an organization to submit a proposal, we are fairly confident that we have winning potential to work with", said Dolores Durant, a project coordinator with GeoConnections. "We go the extra mile in working with them to ensure that their proposal has the best possible prospects for successful implementation."

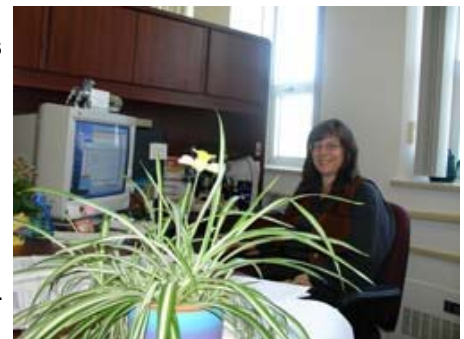
Oxford County is a community in southwestern Ontario that comprises some 2,100 farms. Farming today is much more complex than it was a few generations ago $\frac{3}{4}$ so much so that computers are considered an essential tool for any farm. Oxford County saw that its farmers could benefit greatly from the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure (CGDI) concept, which is a national partnership initiative of GeoConnections. The CGDI aims to collect data once closest to the source from diverse municipal, provincial, territorial and federal agencies. It then allows that data to be made widely available as common Web services on the Internet. With data being held closest to the source, it ensures that the data are maintained and updated and that everyone is using the latest version of the data.

For the farmers of Oxford County, building a tool that uses such data could help them in planning how they fertilize their fields. It could tell them where they could and could not drill a well. It could tell them where they could or could not build a barn. It could help them plan how many livestock their farm could support. The possibilities were endless. The county had previously set up a similar system, but had found it onerous to deal with all the government agencies involved, each requiring a complex negotiation to acquire licences to use data. It was evident that the CGDI concept would save farmers a great deal of time, money and red tape in managing their farms efficiently and complying with myriad regulatory requirements.

Throughout the project, GeoConnections monitored progress closely and provided guidance to help county officials get the best results. GeoConnections also provided \$70,000 for the project, while Oxford County put in \$120,000. That is an investment of less than \$91 for each farm that would use the resulting database.

From such a small investment, farmers gained access to a vast array of data that could be displayed in countless combinations of layers. Map Your Farm makes dozens of data layers available, ranging from water wells to potential contaminants to aquatic habitats. Each layer can be combined with as many or as few other layers as would be needed for a given purpose.

For a farmer, this is a goldmine of information. "Before," says Dolores, "a farmer would have to assemble each type of data by hand. That meant leaving the farm (and doing no income-generating work), going to town, researching the type of data needed (with no assurance that it was the latest available), and (often) paying for it. Now it is all available for free at their fingertips. That's a terrific payoff for a \$91 investment." Not only that, but it's easy to use the system. It takes only two hours of training to get a farmer up and running with it. Better still, Oxford County is preparing a best-practices guide

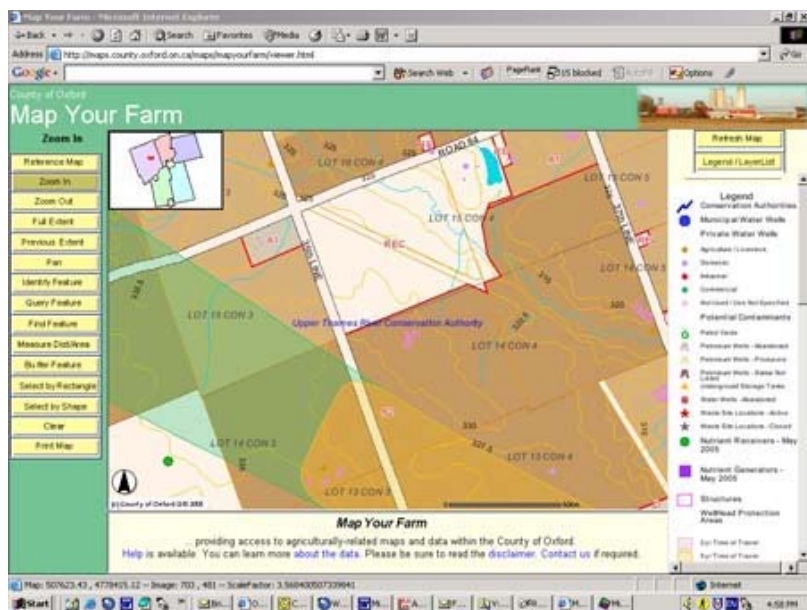


Dr. Dolores Durant in her office at the GeoAccess Division in CCRS.

to help other farming communities replicate its success with Map Your Farm.

The results have been so impressive that the project has won an Award of Excellence from ESRI Canada, a world leader in geographic information systems (GIS) solutions. "With the County of Oxford's geospatial portal, many organizations have made their GIS data available to the agricultural community through a one-stop Web application," said Alex Miller, President of ESRI. "While Map Your Farm is the window to the data, organizations can maintain and host their data through their own Web map services. The Map Your Farm application provides all of the data (e.g., zoning, groundwater resources, aerial photography, surface water, and soils) and maps from all of these organizations available in one location."

If you'd like to see how it all works, be sure to visit [Map Your Farm](#) on the Web. You'll be surprised at the wealth of tools available to the farmers of Oxford County.



A screen capture from Map Your Farm

We've all heard that today's farmers face daunting challenges. Map Your Farm helps them to address those challenges and make their farms more profitable. GeoConnections was pleased and proud to play a leadership role in that success. Information about [GeoConnections](#) and the [Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure](#) and other successful partnerships can be found online.

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