



# Efficient Inspection

## Gateway M275 convertible notebooks help Colorado Department of Agriculture boost effectiveness of field staff.

Colorado's Department of Agriculture employs more than 100 inspectors across the state. These employees work to safeguard consumers and the food supply, and to protect the livestock industry from theft and disease.

Some conduct inspections in grocery stores, checking meat and eggs, enforcing package label requirements, and making sure scales and bar code scanners work correctly. Others examine plants and packaged products at nurseries. A third group, the brand inspectors, work with livestock.

Concerns about the state's food supply make rigorous inspections especially important. And in an era of tight state budgets, inspectors must not only do a thorough job, but must also do it as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. The Department of Agriculture conducts 20 more inspections per week as a result of using new technology.

### ERASING PAPER

The department used mobile technology from Gateway to re-engineer its inspection process.

Until recently, field inspectors completed their reports on paper forms and mailed copies to the department's office in Denver. "The form might take three or four days to get to the office and then maybe a couple more days to get entered into the database," said John Picanso, the department's chief information officer. If an inspection revealed a

problem, managers might not learn of it for almost a week. And because a clerk had to enter data from a handwritten form, errors inevitably crept into the system.

Four years ago, the Department of Agriculture replaced its paper forms with notebook computers from Gateway. Allowing inspectors to enter data at the keyboard and transmit it via modem directly to the database saved time and helped the department capture more information more accurately. But the department needed still more efficiency.

"We wanted to maximize our field force in terms of numbers," Picanso said. "We wanted them to get in and out quickly and still conduct a high-quality inspection."

### FLEXIBLE MOBILE SOLUTION

With help from Microsoft, the Department of Agriculture developed a better mobile solution on Gateway's M275 convertible tablet/notebook PC. Microsoft and the department developed an electronic form that inspectors could complete with a stylus on the tablet screen. Inspectors use checkboxes and pull-down menus to note inspection results; they also write free-form comments in electronic ink. Microsoft underwrote part of the cost of the software development.

The department worked with a second vendor to create the back end of the application. This monitors the data that inspectors upload to the enterprise

## CUSTOMER PROFILE

### AGENCY:

Colorado Department of Agriculture

### MISSION:

The Colorado Department of Agriculture is committed to providing consumer protection, strengthening agriculture's future,

promoting environmental quality and animal health, and ensuring equity and integrity in business and government.

### OBJECTIVE:

To conduct efficient and effective agricultural inspections and monitor potential health hazards in real time.

### GATEWAY SOLUTION:

Gateway's M275 convertible tablet/notebook computer provides the perfect mobile platform for Colorado's paperless field inspection application — saving the department valuable time while delivering more accurate results.

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database, watching for information that could indicate a serious problem, such as a possible contaminant in the feed supply. If data in certain fields exceeds set thresholds, the system transmits an alert.

“It immediately notifies senior management of any ongoing problems that are creeping up,” Picanso said. “Once you start to ‘enterprise’ information, as we do, you need to let all the department managers know the pulse of our work out there.”

By choosing the Gateway M275 instead of a standard notebook computer, the department made sure inspectors would always have the right data entry option for the right task. “We still have some folks who like the keyboard option, especially at home,” Picanso said. “If they want to do data analysis in Microsoft Access, they prefer to use the keyboard. That same inspector then flips the convertible around, and when he goes out for his inspection, he’s got everything he needs right on the glass.”

“Gateway was one of the first companies to offer a machine that combines the attributes of a tablet computer and a full-featured notebook,” Picanso said. And the company is a trusted partner. “Over the years, we’ve had a really good relationship with Gateway, and their service has been excellent,” he said.

### ENSURING LIVESTOCK TRACEABILITY

The department gave M275s to 35 employees who inspect businesses. It’s also piloting use of the notebooks in an application to monitor livestock, so that if an infection occurs in a herd, authorities can trace a sick animal’s history.

In this project, the department uses radio frequency identification (RFID) ear tags to identify individual cows, calves and bulls. Inspectors use handheld readers to collect identification data from groups of cattle and transmits those IDs over a Bluetooth wireless connection to the M275. Inspectors then use the tablet interface to add supplementary information and then transmit the entire report to a central database. “The sum of that data will be housed at the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” Picanso said.

The pilot system uses a secure wired connection to upload data from the M275. Eventually, the

department plans to develop a wireless link. The wireless connection would let the department move real-time data through the air and right into the database. “Then we can really get down to real-time analysis,” Picanso said.

Gateway’s M275 was the perfect choice for this application, Picanso said. “You need a larger footprint than a PDA [personal digital assistant] because you have quite a bit of information to capture. And the clarity of the screen on these M275s is excellent. We’re using them out here in the Colorado sun, where it’s very bright. The visibility’s great; the readability’s just unbelievable.”

Also, the machines stand up well to work in the field. Under Gateway’s Accidental Damage Protection plan, the department will receive a replacement for any machine that breaks because of drops, spills or other mishaps. But so far, the department hasn’t needed to replace or repair any of the machines, Picanso said. “They’re really solid.”

Eventually the department plans to give M275s to all its mobile workers.

### BETTER PROTECTION

The paperless solution improved the speed and accuracy of data collection at the Department of Agriculture. Moving from notebook computers to tablets shaved almost an hour off each business inspection, said Picanso. “We’re able to capture 20 more inspections per week as a result of using the Gateway M275.”

The application also allows the department to provide better protection to citizens, even in an era of tight budgets.

In agriculture and bioscience, it’s particularly important to get information delivered where it’s needed, when it’s needed, Picanso said. “When we learn of a disease, we’ve got to know as soon as possible what we’re doing to try to mitigate it, and what we’re doing to protect the consumer while not stymieing the industry itself.”

“The whole crux of it is, we’re trying to become efficient in a lot of areas,” he said. “Federal, state and local budgeting across the country is going to be more difficult in years to come. So you have to try to carefully select and maximize your resources, whether it’s personnel or IT, and try to get more bang for the buck.”