



## Center for Farm Financial Management

Company:  
Center for Farm Financial  
Management,  
University of Minnesota

Product:  
DeZign for Databases Expert

Key benefits:

- Multiple databases support
- Feature improvement
- Can manage large models
- Text-based files
- The 'Delphi' feel
  
- "Very solid,  
and easy to use"

Field of industry:  
Agriculture, Farm  
Management, Credit  
Analysis

Name spokesperson:  
Wynn Richardson

Website:  
[www.cffm.umn.edu](http://www.cffm.umn.edu)

## Case study

**The Center for Farm Financial Management (CFFM) is a unit in the Department of Applied Economics of the University of Minnesota. Since 1984, CFFM's mission has been to develop farm financial management education and software to serve farm and ranch families and other professionals who work with them. CFFM purchased DeZign for Databases V3 in 2005, and has since upgraded to V4 and V5. Five developers at CFFM, including spokesperson Wynn Richardson, use DeZign for Databases for the development of 'FINPACK'. At CFFM they describe DeZign as: "very solid, and easy to use. We have come to rely on two tools for development: Delphi and DeZign for Databases".**

### Database-neutral software

CFFM's founding project is 'FINPACK', a software package used by farmers and ranchers, educators, and lenders to help with financial planning and analysis. 'FINPACK' is the reason why CFFM started using DeZign for Databases in 2005, Wynn Richardson explains why: "We began a major upgrade of our main software product 'FINPACK'. This upgrade involved moving from our own legacy file format to a more open database format and we needed a tool to help with the design and maintenance of the overall structure as we moved through the upgrade. We also needed a tool that could emit the structure to different database servers. Our intent with this version is to be as database-neutral as possible, and DeZign allows us to do this".

### The Delphi 'feel'

Apart from DeZign's support for multiple database platforms, the other reasons CFFM chose DeZign for Databases for the job, opposed to their former data-modeling tool ERWIN, is because: "DeZign had the features that we wanted at a reasonable price. We needed a database-modeling tool that would allow us to remain database-neutral, help us manage updates to the model and roll those updates out to the users, and of course develop a quality model with referential integrity. It is a good product, and doesn't have too many 'bells and whistles' to get in the way of doing the work. And we like the Delphi 'feel'".

### Text-based DeZign files

Another thing about DeZign that is well liked by CFFM, is that the DeZign files are text-based. This is useful for CFFM because they use StarTeam for all version control and through the text-based files, they can do merges in a 'pinch'.

### **Versioning with DeZign**

Five people use DeZign for Databases at CFFM, for different purposes. Two developers use it to edit the database design; three others use it to review the structure during software development. Versioning the models between updates and comparing versions are the two features that are most used by CFFM, Wynn Richardson explains:

“Our database model for FINPACK is relatively large. The main database has 237 entities with 218 relationships. We started the initial design in February 2005 and began development on the software several months later.”

“In 2007, we began a beta test of the software with a select group of users. An issue we have had with beta tests in the past is data loss – we make a change to the software and/or the underlying data file that would potentially “break” data files from a previous release. We have some users with 15+ years of financial history, so this puts a damper on testers. We knew we would be building large portions of the software while the test was happening, so we built a system to utilize the versioning capability of DeZign.”

“When a beta release is made, we create a version of the model in DeZign and compare it to the version from the previous release. We then create SQL statements that will update a previous version of the database to the current version. Over the course of the beta test we made over 750 changes to the database model and no beta tester lost any data. They didn’t even realize what was happening.”

### **Database quality**

DeZign for Databases improves the quality of the databases at CFFM. Wynn Richardson explains why: “The hints and warnings while checking the model are just like compiling the software. You always forget something somewhere. You’ll forget to specify the primary key on a table or miss a relationship setting. DeZign checks for these types of things and more. If we had done this the old fashioned way, either through Access or SQL Enterprise Manager, the resulting database would have been very sloppy. DeZign is all about developing and deploying a quality database, over and over again”.

### **Feature improvement**

CFFM noticed improvement in DeZign for Databases over time. According to CFFM some good features were made to DeZign over the past couple updates. After having recently upgraded to V5, Wynn Richardson says: “I haven’t yet had to use the feature in Version 5 where it compares the model to an existing database, but I can see where it might be very useful”.