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OPINION

If you are sick of discussing Brexit and the General Election, then there is some hope as at least one of these events will be resolved within the next week. The snap election caught many people by surprise, giving politicians and lobbyists limited time to shape their messages before campaigning began.

Consequently, the NFU produced a short manifesto for farming, calling for five key policies which it says will secure British farming for the good of the country and society for the future beyond Brexit.

Whichever party has a majority in Westminster in a week's time, they will have a challenging few years ahead as they negotiate a Brexit deal. Perhaps an indication of how challenging can be seen by a subtle but significant tone evident from NFU representatives such as President Meurig Raymond and Chair of the Horticulture and Potatoes Board, Ali Capper.

Both spoke at the recent FPJ Live event and while they were keen to stress the need to support British farmers and growers by ensuring access to the European market and a level playing field in terms of support, they also recognised how much British farming, and horticulture in particular, relies on imports from Europe, including seed and plant material, agrochemicals, machinery, fertilisers and more.

Another challenge for the next government will be public health. We have seen how important elderly and social care has been during the campaign, and with the wider health service being pushed harder than ever, surely the time has come for often disjointed government departments, such as health and agriculture, to work together to improve general health and reduce the pressure on the NHS from preventable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

News that ten portions of fruit and veg a day are better for you than five may be encouraging for those of us who produce it, but if we are currently failing to get people to eat their five-a-day, how does it benefit growers or society?

The potential to increase the nutritional benefits of foodstuffs is nothing new; we have had fortified breakfast cereals for years, but it could be the key to tackling some of these issues. With continued concerns about the consumption of fast food, fats and sugars, fresh produce has never had a better opportunity to grow consumption. With the right coordination, the message about home grown fruits and vegetables being good for public health, good for the economy and good for the environment, sell themselves. Now we just need the right policies on issues such as labour, crop protection and Produce Organisations which will allow us to deliver these benefits to everyone.

CONTENTS

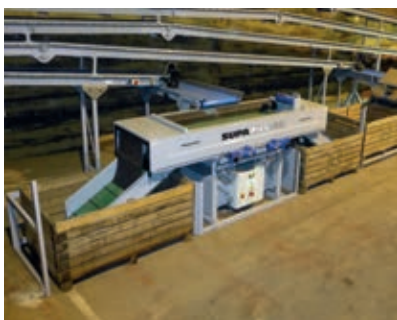
G's Polish expansion..... 4
 More European potatoes..... 6
 New SPot Farm..... 7
 New blight website..... 9
 3Ms investment..... 11
 NFU nutrition project..... 12
 Fruit & Vegetable Congress..... 14
 South Devon Organic Producers..... 16
 Potato storage..... 19
 Bob Thomas profile..... 23
 Farm visit..... 24
 Weed control..... 26
 Potato farm visit..... 28
 Classified..... 29
 Appointments..... 30
 Buyers Guide..... 31

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AHDB Pest Bulletin returns for 2017

AHDB Horticulture's popular Pest Bulletin is back for 2017 with new features and early forecasts. The Pest Bulletin, hosted by Syngenta, provides forecasts and up-to-date reports for most key field crop pests.

Additions to the bulletin this year include using UK and overseas information to predict infestations of diamond-back moth (DBM) and silver Y moth more effectively. It follows exceptionally high levels of DBM infestation in 2016.



Project Leader Dr Rosemary Collier.

The first immigrant DBMs of this season were found in mid-March by moth enthusiasts running light traps, primarily in the South West – possibly arriving from the Continent

with south-westerly winds.

Project Leader Dr Rosemary Collier said: "It is probably too early for them to do major damage in the UK but large migrations later in the year are likely to have an impact." She added it was possible that some diamond-back moths overwintered in the warmest parts of the country.

For aphids, early forecasts from the Rothamsted Insect Survey suggest first flights by species such as *Myzus persicae* will be about a week earlier than average.

Dr Collier said: "The general message from the Rothamsted Insect Survey is if spring doesn't throw any wildly abnormal conditions at us, aphids will be flying a little earlier than usual,

especially in the north and west."

Cabbage root flies and carrot flies are already emerging towards the South of the UK and cabbage root flies are starting to lay eggs. Bean seed flies have also been on the wing for some time.

Keith Mawer, grower at Strawson Ltd, said: "The Pest Bulletin gives an insight into what's happening at an early stage, it focuses attention and allows early intervention."

To view the AHDB Pest Bulletin online, go to: www.syngenta.co.uk/ahdb-pest-bulletin.

For the latest observations and updates, go to: blogs.warwick.ac.uk/rosemarycollier.

Syngenta vegetable team appointments

Syngenta have announced the appointment of two new members to their UK Vegetable Seeds team. Elizabeth Spray joins as a Trials Officer specializing in Brassica Crops; and Luke Duffy joins as a Trials Officer specializing in Leafy Crops.

In their new roles, which started on 1st May, they will be responsible for trials planning and execution, and all pre-commercial evaluation.

They will report to Guido Brass.

Elizabeth, who studied Agriculture with Crop Management at Harper Adams University, has a good knowledge of field vegetables gained both from working as a Placement Student at Syngenta and as a Technical Sales Representative at a competitor company, where she monitored and reported on variety trials.

Luke, who studied Horticulture at University College in Dublin, also has good experience of field vegetables, having worked as a Technical Development Representative at a competitor company.

Right: New Syngenta UK Vegetable Seed team members, Elizabeth Spray and Luke Duffy.



G's expands farming operations in Poland

Cambridge-based G's Group shows no signs of slowing investment in its European farming operations despite the result of last summer's Brexit referendum.

Since buying 120 ha of salad production near Warsaw in 2014, G's Poland has doubled in size each year since to now stand at 950 ha of salads and vegetables. Despite the challenging climate, which can see heat waves giving way to heavy rain, Henry Shropshire, the company's European Business Development Manager who lives in the country believes that Poland could become the centre of G's European operations after Brexit.

"We are already successfully exporting small amounts of labour intensive products to our UK customers from Poland," he said. "This should be relatively straight forward to increase if required. Therefore, with the uncertainty of Brexit, we are certain that whichever way the decisions go, we will have options to keep continuity of supply to our customers."

His father John Shropshire, who is chairman of the G's group of companies, recently told an Ipswich Suffolk Business Club lunch that he was worried about growing anti-British sentiments in Europe.

New look team for British Growers

The British Growers Association has announced a number of changes to its team as part of its strategy to tackle the many challenges facing the industry at the present time. The organisation is also looking to add value for the industry and identify opportunities wherever possible, and has adopted a new strapline: 'fresh thinking – growing opportunities'.

James Richardson will head up the organisation's finance operation, supported by Karen Smith, who takes over as Management Accountant. Coral Russell has joined as Crop Association Executive, and will work with Jayne Dyas on Crop Associations.

British Growers has also taken the opportunity to strengthen its administration team. Alison Frith joined just before Christmas, and will work with Chief Executive, Jack Ward and Operations Director, Lisa Eagles, taking on a broad range of responsibilities. Peter Crowe, who has extensive experience in the fresh produce industry, has been appointed as communications consultant for British Growers. He will be working with Jack Ward on a part-time basis to ensure that the organisation's messages are communicated.

Jack Ward says: "I am very confident that with the new look team, we can develop and extend the range of services we can offer, create efficiencies, and provide a highly cost-effective service to our member organisations."



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Bejo introduces its first True Potato Seed variety

Bejo has obtained breeder's rights on its first True Potato Seed (TPS) variety. This new potato hybrid, Oliver F1, can be cultivated directly from botanical seed and, after transplanting, produces table potatoes in one season. Oliver F1 is a slightly floury table potato with an oval shape, a very smooth skin and a very

good flavour.

Research Director Bert Schrijver comments: "Breeders and researchers from Bejo have worked for over 15 years to develop the company's first tetraploid hybrid potato variety that grows from botanical seed. This variety, Oliver F1, has been tested in recent years in fields in the Netherlands, in cooperation

with Naktuinbouw (the Netherlands Inspection Service for Horticulture) and a number of growers. The process of seed production has been successful and seed is already available".

Growing potatoes from botanical

hybrid seed, rather than from vegetatively propagated tubers, provides several advantages for growers and others in the distribution chain. True Potato Seed is disease-free, ensuring a healthy start of cultivation, while its compactness makes it easy to transport and store. TPS is also available for year-round planting.

"The advantages of TPS are particularly important for smallholder farmers in Africa, Asia and Central America," says Rien van Bruchem, Crop Manager TPS. "In these developing regions, long distribution times for tuber potatoes can have devastating effects on the quality of the propagation material. In contrast, the quality of TPS typically holds strong during the

distribution process."

In the coming years Bejo will focus on selected markets in these areas, working with local partners and growers to develop further knowledge through commercial testing and to provide cultivation advice. In addition, this new variety will be tested in several countries of the EU in order to assess its value.

Bejo expects TPS to have hardly any influence on the well-organized sector for vegetatively propagated tuber potatoes. Growing potatoes from TPS has advantages mainly in regions that are relatively difficult to access.

Oliver F1 is the first promising variety to result from Bejo's TPS Breeding Program. More varieties are currently in development as well.



Oliver F1, Bejo's first tetraploid hybrid potato variety.

Haith Group announces new alliances

The Haith Group has announced two exclusive new alliances with respected industry specialists, Brillopak and Deprez Construct, that will extend Haith's product portfolio and enable them to provide customers with complete package solutions.

UK based company Brillopak, specialise in automated end of line packing and palletising solutions. These include high-speed packing of product into trays and boxes as well as robotic tray handling and stacking.

Deprez Construct are Belgian market leaders in automated box handling and storage systems, aimed at improving

efficiencies for packers and large scale vegetable growers,

The new alliances will enable Haith to offer a complete package, focusing on gentle handling, high wash quality, improved pack out, and reduced labour costs, aided by creating efficient layouts with limited forklift truck movements.

Haith will also be able to offer their clients the latest up to date vegetable packing solutions, with high quality fully automated lines incorporating 3D layout design, proven project management, HMI line control, and diagnostics incorporating Haith Group technologies.

"With our new and long-standing industry partners, we

believe we can offer our customers the best in Grading, Handling, Washing, Optical Sorting, Packing and Water Treatment, coupled to industry

leading project design, manufacturing facilities, on-site installation and aftercare," says Sales manager, Duane Hill.



A Brillopak robotic tray filling and stacking system, with automatic tray and pallet feed.

Estimated increase in N.W. Europe potato area

The first potato area estimate from the North-Western European Potato Growers (NEPG) region suggests a possible increase of 3.6% compared with last season. The total planted area is estimated to be approximately 572,000ha (excluding potatoes for seed and starch), which would be the highest area for the last ten years, if achieved.

Amber Cottingham, analyst at AHDB said: "Earlier expectations

suggested growth in the area would have been much larger in order to fulfil the continuously expanding requirements of the European processing industry. The poor yielding crop of the 2016 season has forestalled this by causing a shortage in seed availability across much of Europe. Seed availability in GB was better as yield in Scotland, a key producer of seed potatoes, was higher than in other areas of Europe."

It is important to note is that the GB proportion of the 2017 area estimate is based on a historical average. The NEPG area estimate is therefore likely to change as more information becomes available.

AHDB Potatoes' production modelling based on planted area and various yield scenarios, forecast a year-on-year production increase of between 3% and 21%.

Amber said: "Our analysis

suggests that if the current area estimate is realised, production is likely to increase across the NEPG area, even if the yields achieved are similar to the lows of 2012, which was an usually low yielding year.

However, with a possible range of between 25 million tonnes and almost 30 million tonnes, there is still considerable uncertainty around how the season will likely play out."

SCEPTREplus announces crop trial priorities

Crop trial priorities for the first year of AHDB's £1.4 million SCEPTREplus project have been announced by its Steering Group. The timetable of work will focus on delivering trials specifically targeting key disease, pest and weed problems identified as high priorities in the new 2017-2020 horticulture strategy and also through the AHDB Horticulture gap analysis.

The project consortium led by Agri-Food Solutions consists of NIAB-EMR, RSK ADAS, Stockbridge Technology Centre and the University of Warwick. Dr Ed Moorhouse, director at Agri-Food Solutions and independent industry chairman of the

SCEPTREplus project, said: "There is no question that this project is critical to the viability of the industry and this is reflected through routine grower feedback. Without sufficient tools to practice efficient weed, pest and disease control, some crops will be very hard to sustain."

Key targets for 2017 include Aphids, Thrips, Downy and Powdery Mildew, Botrytis, Phytophthora, and a range of annual and perennial weeds.

Dr Rosemary Collier, science lead for SCEPTREplus, said: "Some crop protection issues are common to several sectors. For example, downy mildew, while generally

host-specific, affects a wide range of protected and outdoor edible and ornamental crops and there is considerable merit in adopting a functional or generic approach to evaluating the efficacy of products and undertaking crop safety screening trials."

Right: Visitors at an AHDB SCEPTRE event.



New Strategic Potato (SPot) Farm

Shropshire-based Heal Farms has become the latest addition to AHDB's Strategic Potato (SPot) Farm family. The arable and poultry farm estate, which grows around 500 hectares of potatoes each year, will become the new home of SPot Farm West.

It will host a series of farm walks and open days, the first of which will be held on 6 June. There will also be a results day at the end of the year.

Anne Stone, Knowledge Exchange Manager for AHDB Potatoes, who leads the SPot Farm West project, said: "Each farm has its own environment and challenges, so it is exciting to have an opportunity to see how effective the latest technology is when applied on Heal Farms' Shropshire soils."

Farms Director at Heal Farms, Matthew Wallace, said: "As a business, we are interested in improving productivity and the SPot Farm programme provides us with an opportunity to do that. As well as working alongside researchers and experts, it will be interesting to hear about the approach taken by other growers in the West at the open days and farm walks."

There will be six technical demonstrations at the SPot Farm, all related to potato cyst nematode (PCN) control. PCN is the most important potato pest in Britain and has the potential to cause substantial yield losses. There will be a range of complementary measures demonstrated at Heal Farms, including resistant varieties, trap crops, biofumigation and nematicide regimes.



Four de-stoners in line at Heal Farms.



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Arysta LifeScience launches new biostimulant in UK

A biostimulant to improve the quality of fruit and vegetable yields whilst relieving stress has been officially launched in the UK by Arysta LifeScience. BM Start, already used throughout Europe, is a liquid formulation based on Physio Activator Technology, to improve plant health and the marketable yield of the crop. This includes improving fertilisation for better fruit setting, improving the uniformity of the fruit, while alleviating stress and limiting flower drop.

The product contains GA142, an active ingredient found in seaweed harvested in North Brittany where the tides are some of the highest in the world. The GA142 is extracted within 24 hours using a unique cold manufacturing process to retain the active characteristics of fresh seaweed and to ensure a consistently high quality product.

This active helps to unlock nutrients in the soil which may otherwise be unavailable to the plant, and stimulates the enzymes that enhance plant root growth. According to Arysta LifeScience, fertilisation is improved and cell division is stimulated, and trials have shown that this can

result in yield benefits of 10-15% and an increase in top size category of 8-15%.

Arysta's Technical Lead for Vegetables, Alison Casey, said: "We are delighted to be officially launching BM Start in the UK, a complementary product that works alongside traditional crop protection techniques. Maintaining plant health is vital in enabling farmers to produce an efficient crop, and that is essentially what BM Start does – improves the plant's overall health and ability to achieve its potential yield.

"Biostimulants and the biosolutions market make a considerable contribution to the sustainable agriculture agenda, and we are proud to be developing our portfolio to include more of these products."

BM Start has a wide range of applications, including fruit trees, grapes, berries and fruiting vegetables both in indoors and outdoors. It is compatible with most insecticides, fungicides, PGRs and fertilisers with a dose rate of 2 L/ha. Used in conjunction with other crop protection methods, biostimulants can have a positive effect on the marketable crop yield, meaning less food waste and improved profitability.

Potassium for stressed potato crops

After one of the driest springs for decades plus low night-time temperatures many crops are showing the typical symptoms of stress. At times such as this, foliar applications of potassium can help according to Dick Holden of Specialist fertiliser supplier Solufeed. "Foliar applications of potassium are proven to stimulate and improve the uptake of nutrients applied earlier and at planting," he says.

"In many crops the leaf canopy has not developed and this will be to the detriment of tuber initiation and development. These crops are up to a month behind and require a foliar feed to give them a boost. As the potassium requirement is greater than other nutrients at this time, potatoes are particularly responsive to a foliar application rather than being dependent upon soil reserves."

Mr Holden recommends K-Leaf, to provide potassium in a soluble form which will readily be taken up by the plant. "It will also improve resistance to disease and stress whilst leading to more robust tubers and skin set," he says. K-Leaf dissolves rapidly and is easy to apply with a conventional sprayer typically at a rate of 6kg per hectare in 200 litres of water and costs approximately £12 per hectare.

ICL to launch single fertilizer range

Leading fertilizer manufacturer and distributor, ICL Specialty Fertilizers, is launching a new complete portfolio of single source, water-soluble fertilizers to the UK agricultural market this summer, and strengthening the range will be two completely unique products.

ICL agronomists recognise that soils, crops and climates are unique and all fields and crops will have different nutritional needs. The Nova portfolio will include 11 products, offering a comprehensive solution to fertilizer requirements, which is also backed by technical support.

"All ICL single water-soluble fertilizers will be derived from an unrivalled quality source and are highly concentrated. It's going to be a broad range and all Singles will be pure and fully soluble. We offer consistent quality," says Tal Bugatos, straights business director for ICL. "We're really excited about two completely

exclusive products to the Nova range, that will offer growers numerous crop benefits."

"Nova Pekacid 0-60-20 is ICL's patented water-soluble PK fertilizer Low PH (2.2) and is ideal for open field and soil-less crops. Growers will be able to use it successfully in hard water conditions," he says. The product will acidify the soil, which increases the availability and uptake of phosphorus and micronutrients. It will also provide acidity to neutralize and dissolve bicarbonates, avoiding the problem of scaling and clogging of drippers in irrigation systems.

Also, completely unique to ICL, will be MagPhos 0-55-18+7MgO, offering all three essential nutrients – magnesium, phosphorus and potassium, in one bag. "The uniqueness will lie in the fact that the product will have a high-level of magnesium, phosphorus and potassium, while still being slightly acidic, with a PH of 3.5," adds Tal.

AGCO announces new southern Massey distributor

AGCO has appointed C&O Tractors Ltd as the new distributor for its Massey Ferguson farm machinery brand in South Central England. This new move is part of AGCO's long-term strategy to strengthen customer service, offer full-line product ranges and ensure an increased availability of exclusive brand expertise at its distribution outlets.

"This is a significant new appointment in this key territory," says Mark Casement, AGCO Director Distribution Management UK and Ireland. "C&O Tractors is highly-experienced, extremely well-equipped and fully-focused on serving customers in this important farming area which accounts for nearly 10% of total industry tractor sales in the UK."

Straddling several counties, C&O Tractors' exclusive Massey Ferguson territory includes parts of Dorset, Somerset, Hants, West Sussex and Wilts together with the Isle of Wight.

The company will be responsible for the sales and support of the full-line of Massey Ferguson machinery including tractors, combine harvesters, balers, hay & forage tools, grounds care and materials handling equipment.

"We are very excited to be joining the Massey Ferguson family," comments Andy Coles, C&O Tractors Chairman and Managing Director. "The strength and depth of Massey Ferguson's product line-up provides a huge choice of award-winning equipment backed by MF's world-class After-Sales."

New AHDB blight website

AHDB Potatoes has launched a new website to help combat the industry's most threatening disease. *Blight.ahdb.org.uk* will allow industry experts to report blight outbreaks more efficiently than ever before.

As a part of its research into blight populations, AHDB Potatoes' Fight Against Blight campaign has been redeveloped and modernised to capture more UK blight outbreaks than ever before. Fight Against Blight, which started in 2006, is a sampling service which notifies the industry of outbreaks and risk throughout Great Britain.

Anonymous samples are collected from around the country by a team of volunteer Blight Scouts and sent to FERA

(Food and Environment Research Agency) for initial tests. All positive results are then sent to the James Hutton Institute for detailed analysis.

Claire Hodge, Knowledge Exchange Manager for AHDB Potatoes, said: "The introduction of our new website will make it easier than ever to report outbreaks and stamp out blight at the earliest opportunity. Growers should check whether their agronomist or key staff are part of the Blight Scout network and that their crops are being effectively scouted."

Anyone who would like to volunteer as an AHDB Blight Scout can do so by visiting the new website and registering their details.

AVR launches new trailed potato planter

AVR is launching a new 4-row trailed potato planter, called the Ceres 450. Featuring a hopper capacity of either 3,500 kg (4 x 75cm) or 4,000 kg (4 x 90cm), the new planter can be combined with tilling equipment, such as the specially designed AVR GE-Force C ridge cultivator, the basic AVR GE-Force or with other brands.

Each individual potato row assembly can be disconnected manually although an electrical option is also available. A clever mechanical design allowing up to 30° of wheel movement from left to right, ensures that the rotation axis always remains vertical, and that the wheels constantly remain in contact with the ground.



AVR's new Ceres 450 trailed potato planter.

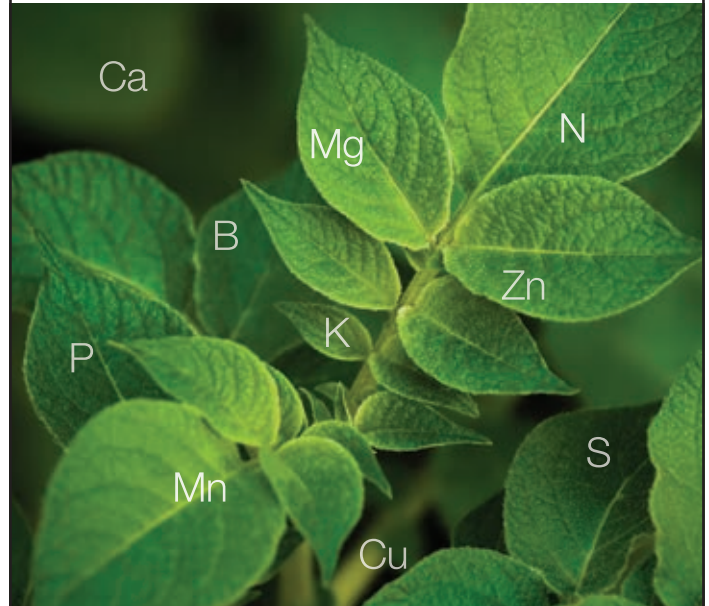
The 4x75 version can be equipped with either a narrow top ridging hood with round sides or a wide top hood with straight sides. The 4x90 version is equipped with a wide top ridging hood and straight sides. Wear plates feature a special hard-wearing coating made from Boron 27.

The ridging hood is operated as standard by means of an automatic pressure control. However, users can also opt for the well-known PDC system (Proportionally Distance Controlled), which uses two ultrasound sensors to measure the amount of soil in the hood. Based upon this input, the pressure on the hood is adjusted in order to maintain even ridging.

The control panel of the Ceres 450 is designed in the same way as other AVR machines, and features a 7" touch screen. The associated joystick is ergonomically designed.

The planter can be used in conjunction with a GPS system, to control functions like switching the potato planting channel feeders.

The AVR Ceres 450 will be exhibited for the first time on the AVR Stand at the Potato Europe exhibition in Emmeloord in September 2017.



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NFU Potato Forum chairman and vice chairman are re-appointed

Alex Godfrey and Tim Papworth have been re-appointed as chairman and vice chairman respectively of the NFU Potato Forum.

Alex Godfrey, who farms in Lincolnshire, said: "I am delighted to be re-appointed as chairman for a further two years and I look forward to continuing to deliver the forum's objectives during 2017. We have a lot to do. Not least with ensuring the potato sector is well represented in NFU Brexit policies, but also in addressing some of the key concerns for

our members in the domestic market.

"The past few years have been incredibly challenging for the potato sector, so it remains vitally important that the NFU can deliver robust support to growers. That is why we have a dedicated forum to ensure the views of the potato sector are embedded within NFU policy.

Whether it is crop protection, labour needs, legislative changes on water policy or tackling a lack of transparency on potato sales, the NFU Potato Forum helps identify the issues

affecting members and creates a plan of action to address them.

NFU Potato Forum vice chairman, Tim Papworth, who grows 10 varieties of potatoes for several customers in Norfolk, said: "This will be my second term as vice chairman, after holding the post of chairman since its creation. I am pleased to be able to support Alex and

the forum members, represent my fellow potato growers during what will be undoubtedly the most critical period for farmers and growers in a generation.

"We also need to harness greater support from the supply chain to ensure that growers can operate in a profitable market and have the confidence to invest in the future."

Bejo lettuce varieties resistant to new Bremia race

Last month the International Bremia Evaluation Board for the EU (IBEB-EU) officially designated a new race of Bremia 33, (downy mildew) in lettuce. Bejo have announced that with only a few exceptions all of their varieties with resistance BL16-32 are also resistant to Bremia BL:33EU.

Gerhard Voelkel, Bejo's Crop Manager for lettuce, says: "Our assortment in Iceberg, Batavia, Butterhead and Babyleaf in general, demonstrates strong resistances. The resistance to Bremia 33 across this assortment confirms to me that we are performing particularly well on resistance breeding".

Lisa Tokelove, Elsoms Salad and Diverse Manager, said; "This is great news for the UK's lettuce growers. Bejo's lettuce material is being trialed and tested under commercial conditions in the UK and it is reassuring that our varieties combine excellent agronomic qualities with mildew resistance."



Tim Papworth.



Alex Godfrey.



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THREE MUSKETEERS GROUP OPEN NEW POTATO GRADING FACILITY

3Ms (Three Musketeers) have been operating since 2001 and now have six farming shareholders who between them farm more than 34,000 acres. After nearly 18 months of careful investigation, they recently opened their new potato grading line, which is based at their site on the ex-USAF airbase at Bentwaters, near Woodbridge. **Richard Shepherd-Barron** reports.

A large number of guests went along in mid-May to see the new operation officially opened by Dr Therese Coffey. Dr Coffey has been MP for the Suffolk Coastal region since 2010 and is currently the Conservative candidate in the next general Election. She has also been the Minister at DEFRA dealing with flooding and coastal problems.

Edward Blanchard, managing director for 3Ms, said: "This is a project that has been talked about for several years and has finally come to fruition. We're a relatively small company, particularly in terms of our number of employees, so it's a massive achievement to be able to put such a modern piece of equipment into our business. As a company owned by collaborating growers here in Suffolk and working to market their produce, it's imperative that we generate the best return from every sale that we make".

Mr Blanchard said the new grader will help sales to existing customers as well as opening doors to new ones. It will allow 3Ms to grade potatoes on

behalf of other growers in the area which was of mutual benefit to everyone concerned.

Praising 3Ms investment and vision to bring this new grading line into operation, Dr Coffey said: "As a Minister for DEFRA, it is very encouraging to see farmers investing in the future in these difficult times. This equipment adds considerable value to this important potato growing region, with 3Ms having found a solution to increase their output while saving money. I know they are also keen to help other farms in Suffolk realise higher values for their crops."

3Ms needed a new building to house the grading line, and this was erected in a "record-breaking" eight weeks by PFG Fabrication. 3Ms were successful in gaining a Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) grant in conjunction with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and received £250,000 towards the investment. This is one of the largest projects in the country to be funded by these grants and, after reviewing the business plan for 3Ms, HSBC



3Ms' new Haith SUPAFILL 600 grading line.

provided the finance for the remaining investment.

Three Musketeers' growers wanted to get their grading right and maximise their income from the smaller-sized fractions within the crops, while still adding value to the larger sizes that are no longer in demand from the UK retailers. 3Ms are looking to add more value to the sales they have currently, by serving the retail packers with specific sizes and selling the rest elsewhere.

The new SUPAFILL 600 potato grading line was supplied by Haith, with some equipment also coming from Tomra and Dijkstra. It will offer an increased hourly output, and will reduce the requirement for the older and less efficient graders on site to be used as much as they were previously. The inbuilt infra-red sorter removes stones and soil from the potatoes before they pass through visual grading by

trained staff and are then sorted into sizes by the vertical grading module.

The early variety Swift is already being run through the grader with great success. 3Ms growers planted this, along with another 900 acres of crop under fleece to enable their crops to be ready for sale as early as possible in the season.

3Ms who were featured in *The Vegetable Farmer* in March last year, are a major supplier of new and early maincrop potatoes to the fresh potato market. Around 95% of their potatoes and onions go to major retailers and processors with the remainder being sold to local wholesalers and retailers. The group of six farms has expanded its business considerably in recent years, with an increased acreage and tonnage of potatoes. Each farm operates its own staff and planting/growing/harvesting equipment.

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CAN THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF UK GROWN PRODUCE BE RAISED?

There have been many studies identifying strong links between the consumption of fruit and vegetables and improved health. But eating several portions of produce a day can be expensive and a challenge. Adrian Tatum investigates a new idea by the NFU to find ways of raising the nutrient levels in crops.

A major new study launched in February revealed that eating ten, rather than five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, could reduce health risks such as heart disease and cancer considerably.

The research, conducted by scientists at Imperial College, London, showed that although a high fruit and vegetable intake has been recommended for the prevention of cardiovascular disease and some cancers, questions remain with regard to the amounts and types of fruits and vegetables that are most strongly associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, total cancer or all-cause mortality; and with regard to the burden of disease and mortality that may be attributed to a low fruit and vegetable intake.

Some other notable observations were also made. During the study, a meta-analysis of 95 studies of fruit and vegetable consumption was undertaken. Reductions in risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality were observed up to an intake of 800g/day of fruit and vegetables combined, whereas for total cancer no further reductions in risk were observed above 600g/day.

Inverse associations were observed between intake of apples and pears, citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables and salads and cruciferous vegetables and cardiovascular disease and mortality; and between green-yellow vegetables and cruciferous vegetables and total cancer risk. It also revealed that an estimated 5.6 and 7.8 million premature deaths worldwide during 2013 may be attributable to a fruit and vegetable intake below 500 and 800 g/day, respectively.

"A change in the diet towards a higher intake of fruit and vegetables and other plant foods

could also have other important health as well as environmental benefits. Our meta-analysis provides further support for public health recommendations and interventions to increase fruit and vegetable intake for prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer and premature mortality," says the report.

Lead author, Dr Dagfinn Aune said that several potential mechanisms could explain why fruit and vegetables have such profound health benefits: "Fruit and vegetables have been shown to reduce cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and to boost the health of our blood vessels and immune system. This may be due to the complex network of nutrients they hold. For instance they contain many antioxidants, which may reduce DNA damage, and lead to a reduction in cancer risk."

He went on to say that compounds called glucosinolates in cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, activate enzymes that may help prevent cancer. Furthermore, fruit and vegetables may also have a beneficial effect on the naturally-occurring bacteria in our gut. "Most likely it is the whole package of beneficial nutrients you obtain by eating fruits and vegetables that is crucial is health. This is why it is important to eat whole plant foods to get the benefit, instead of taking antioxidant or vitamin supplements (which have not been shown to reduce disease risk)."

So here we have confirmation from a major new study that could be advantageous to fresh produce marketing departments, to help enhance their story about the benefits of eating increased amounts of home grown produce.

But the truth is, eating five portions a day can be a challenge in today's society, let alone ten, especially in relation to feeding

children. This can mean a lot of fruit and veg is wasted in households across the UK and eating a large amount every day can be very expensive.

So, what if it were possible to raise the nutritional levels in a single piece of fruit or vegetable, or adapt or change the specific nutrients within it to increase the benefits it offers? The NFU's Board for Horticulture and Potatoes is about to kick-start a project looking at just this. Leading the project will be board member, Sarah Dawson. She thinks if this can be achieved, it will bring benefits to all involved.

"The health benefits of what we grow is undoubtedly our biggest USP as an industry and there is a real opportunity here to enhance our British brand by finding ways of increasing the nutrients levels in every single piece of produce we grow. That will have benefits for the consumers buying it and also for the growers producing it.

"The potential difference it could make to growers if we can increase the value of each acre they grow because we can prove we have increased the nutritional value of that crop is huge for them and every other stakeholder in the industry. This would give us another reason to tell consumers why buying British is a really good idea," she says.

Jack Ward, Chief Executive of British Growers, thinks work like this can only help the industry and the UK in general. "I think there is a real opportunity to still have a closer connection between UK fresh produce production and consumption and the UK's health agenda," he says. "I don't think we have paid enough attention to this, considering that health issues such as heart disease and obesity are costing the NHS £5bn a year to treat. We know consumption of fruit and vegetables is good for us; what is less clear is what nutrients are really good for us and what types of fruit and veg we should be eating to consume

more of them," he adds.

"Raising and/or identifying these key nutrients would be a good thing for the whole industry and perhaps lead to producing and marketing more 'super-foods' from the fresh produce category." Mr Ward says the challenge will come during the breeding process. "I think the challenge will be that if we increase the nutrient levels then that might bring into question whether disease resistance can be as strong or other factors such as taste and texture might change."

But how could the raising of nutrient levels actually be done? Scientists in other food sectors are already making progress in this area. Dr Brittany Hazard is a Research Leader at the Quadram Institute (previously known as the Institute of Food Research) and the John Innes Centre. She has been studying how to improve cereal grain quality for human health.

This involves building strong connections between the fields of plant breeding and genetics with food and health. The work focuses on studying starch composition and structure in wheat because this can influence its digestibility. Starch that is resistant to digestion can play an important role in maintaining healthy blood sugar levels in humans.

A key aim of Dr Hazard's research is to develop wheat genotypes with novel starch compositions and structural



Sarah Dawson is leading the new project.



Dr Brittany Hazard.

properties which can help improve health. "Starch is the main component of wheat grain and processed refined flours, and with this project we want to understand how different starch genes control the starch structure and digestibility in different wheat based foods like bread and pasta," Dr Hazard tells The Vegetable Farmer.

"But it is also very important to consider how the new starch traits could affect agronomic

performance and end-use quality for milling and baking. Thus, a lot more research has to be done to ensure that the new starch traits are commercially viable to achieve desirable levels of resistant starch for a positive health impact while maintaining good yields and quality."

Importantly, Dr Hazard thinks this method could be

applied elsewhere. "I think this crop genetics approach could be applied to developing nutritional traits for healthier vegetable varieties," she says.

"We would welcome the chance to explore this in more detail," says Sue Kennedy, Head of Research & Development at Elsoms Seeds. "We think it is a sensible way forward to start identifying areas of breeding that could in the future help increase the nutrients in UK grown crops

because that could bring many benefits for the sector."

"For us, this is something that could certainly have massive potential but for it to work we need every stakeholder in the sector on-board. It needs to work for growers, the supermarkets and other retailers as well as the consumer and also for us at the start of the process to be a success that guarantees benefits for everyone.

To start to develop this we need a greater clarity and understanding of what the industry needs and how it will work for each stakeholder," she adds.

Ms Kennedy says the science and technology is already there to select certain characteristics in seeds to help raise the nutrition value. "The challenge will be to avoid working in silo with specific nutrients but to find a way to raise all the levels of nutrients in the crop without affecting the other characteristics



Sue Kennedy of Elsoms Seeds.

that are so important such as pest and disease resistance and flavour," she says. "But, there will certainly be more focus on the health benefits of produce in the future."

The NFU plans to conduct a round table discussion in a few months' time, to discuss how different stakeholders in the industry can identify the way forward to help raise nutrient levels in UK grown fresh produce.

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BREXIT CREATES POTENTIAL FOR BETTER UK AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The fourth annual FPJ Live UK Fruit and Vegetable Congress took place on what has now become known as Star Wars day (May the fourth). The conference opened with a clever parody of the famous opening scene from the film, where moving text was used to introduce the story. Like the film, this set out the key topics for the rest of the day, including the continued rise of the discounters, Brexit, falling farm gate prices and innovation in the supply chain. **Richard Crowhurst** reports.

NFU President Meurig Raymond used his opening address to set out the organisation's demands for the forthcoming general election. Emphasising his credentials as a fresh producer grower (this year his farm will plant 400 acres of potatoes for supply to Puffin Produce), he said the snap election, together with Brexit represented a seismic shift in the UK's farming industry. "The right post-Brexit trade deal is absolutely critical, but so is [our] agricultural policy," he said.

Once again he emphasised that farming needed unrestricted access, not only to the European market, but also to labour, which he said was the most immediate concern for the fresh produce sector. "Our

already struggling to recruit the necessary staff and the situation had worsened almost overnight since the vote. "A solution is urgently needed," he stressed.

Mr Raymond called on whoever wins the general election to provide: "A new agricultural policy which assists in the development of an increasingly productive, progressive and, above all, profitable farming sector." He added that MPs needed to see "the total food supply chain, from farmers to processors, to manufacturers and retailers," adding: "Much of the food supply chain is domestically based and increasingly, I'm pleased to say, we are committed to increasing that domestic production, yet we cannot operate in isolation.



NFU president Meurig Raymond.

of their business.

Chris Cowan of Kantar Worldpanel presented the most up to date statistics on fresh produce consumption and shopper behaviour, pointing out that while the value of the market had risen from £10.9 billion in 2013 to £11.8 billion this year against a background of falling grocery sales, this had been driven by increasing volumes while average spend per shop had actually fallen more than 3 per cent. In particular, the vegetable sector was losing out to fruit and prepared produce.

There has been a widespread switch from whole-head vegetables to prepared produce, and potatoes in particular had suffered from the negative press about carbohydrate consumption, with a quarter of those people who make up the panel of 30,000 shoppers concerned about carbs. However, he pointed out that people do not always act in the way they say they will. "People will talk about things that they are worried about, but they don't always act on them," he said.

While accepting that price can influence purchases of fresh produce, particularly the whole-head market, he warned retailers against relying on price promotions to drive sales: "You can play around with price a lot in produce, but it doesn't

necessarily increase volume because there are lots of other things that will affect why people will buy produce." In terms of market share, all of the top ten retailers had seen sales growth in the last quarter, but convenience of location is still the number one driver for which store people visit.

This is something that is well understood by the Co-op, which Category Development Planner Fiona Clayton explained had, "quite a different

way of doing business." The company has shown an excellent performance over the last year, showing 1.5 per cent growth compared with a market average of just 0.3 per cent. It has introduced initiatives such as relaunching its membership scheme, revamping stores and a widespread range review.



Fiona Clayton, Category Development Planner at the Co-op.

She stressed that produce is a very competitive market place: "We need to motivate shoppers to choose to shop on the high street." As a result the retailer is 'evolving' its supplier relationships, with the aim of "Fewer, better, more engaged suppliers." Part of this strategy will involve becoming closer to growers, and so far 15 three-year supply contracts have been signed with UK suppliers, with named growers and 269 British growers included in the first steps to creating dedicated



The day opened with a reference to 'Star Wars day', May the Fourth.

message to government on labour is clear," he said. "An abrupt reduction in the number of EU workers available to work in the UK post-Brexit, would cause massive disruption to the entire food supply chain." Prior to the referendum labour providers and employers were

Growers rely on imported goods and inputs, particularly seed, rootstock, machinery, fertilisers and chemicals." He pointed out that the ability of many grower businesses to import produce to cover gaps in seasonal availability was also crucial to the continued success



The 'Big Debate' panel included, from left to right: Jack Ward of British Growers; Anna Taylor, Executive Director of Food Foundation; Nick Marston, Managing Director of Berry Gardens; and Ali Capper, Chair of the NFU Horticulture & Potatoes Board.

grower groups. However, during questioning, some existing suppliers raised the issue of 'double digit rebates' and pointed out that supplier relationships had to work both ways. "Going forward our new relationships are not built up in that way," stressed Ms Clayton.

Some of the leading figures in the industry, including Jack Ward of British Growers, fruit grower and NFU spokesman Ali Capper and Nick Marston of Berry Gardens, discussed key issues facing the sector and once again Brexit dominated the agenda. Mr Ward pointed out that Producer Organisations are a key way for small producers to reduce the risk of vital investment while Nick Marston agreed that funding needed to be maintained in order to allow UK producers to compete on a level playing field with their European competitors who will still benefit from €830 million of PO funding a year when the UK leaves the EU. Both he and Ali Capper also stressed the dangers of introducing tariffs to 'protect' British farmers from imports. "We bring in a lot of plant material from Holland each year and we wouldn't want to see any restrictions on those," he pointed out.

The need for more joined up thinking across government was also high on the panel's wish list, such as the Department of Health recognising the benefits of fresh produce in reducing the Nation's health care bill, and using this to offset potential industry funding from Defra. However, Anna Taylor, executive director of the Food Foundation warned that there was a danger that issues could

become stuck between government departments: "Generally people understand the role of fruit and veg in the diet, but how do you actually [eat it in practice]?"

"We need to be much more positive with the consumer," stressed Ali Capper. "Our sector has some really positive stuff to say. We have to think about where the consumer is coming from."

As well as challenges, Brexit creates the potential for a new and better UK agricultural policy, something which Jack Ward was positive about: "It is a terrific opportunity to unpick the CAP and make it more fit for purpose for the UK. More money for horticulture to drive R&D and innovation could make a huge difference."

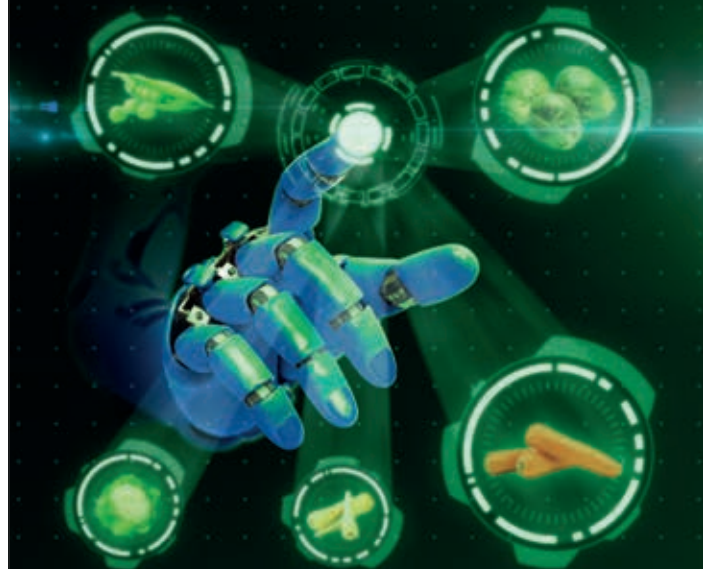
"Unpicking state aid rules might help promote UK messages," added Ali. "There is an opportunity to sort out regulation. For example, crop protection regulation for a lot of farmers and growers is not fit for purpose."

After lunch the agenda turned to marketing, with branding experts Tunde Daczo of Storm Strategy and Ben Towers and Roger Williams of Zest the Agency, providing an insight into 'Consumer 4.0' and the role that modern influencers, such as high profile figures on social media can play in promoting products and lifestyle trends. There is no doubt that the recent boom in demand for avocados has been helped massively by social media, but several speakers warned against trying to apply what had been successful for one product to others.

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'the most influential teenager on the planet' by The Times. He suggested that using social media and new forms of influencer should not be seen as being too expensive, particularly when compared to traditional advertising and PR.

"More under 25s now watch YouTube daily than watch television," he pointed out. "If you are going to do social media, then you need to make it effective. For example Twitter is now categorised as a news [rather than networking] app."

While the multiples may be engaged in an ongoing price war while they try to rediscover the margins of a former era, other sectors are becoming increasingly important. Box schemes such as Hello Fresh are growing



Stephen Oswald is Chief Executive of Bidfresh.

while Darren Henaghan, managing director of Borough Market in London described how quality ingredients, provenance and consumer experience are driving growth, not just at Borough, but at many of London's other local food markets.

The logistics of supplying these markets may not fit with many larger growers, but Stephen Oswald of Bidfresh explained that fresh produce is a rapidly expanding part of his company's activities. Unlike some other companies, Bidfresh trades locally using locally established business names and brands and has a strong background in fish, although meat and fresh



The day closed with an interview with Fresca Group Chairman, Chris Mack.

produce are increasingly important.

"We have 21 brands operating from 15 sites, each with their own branded vehicles and very little consolidation," he explained. This includes three fresh produce businesses: R Noone & Son, Oliver Kay and Campbell Brothers.

Most of the company's clients come from the catering and restaurant sector and rely on Bidfresh deliveries. "We like customers that are painful and that make us work hard," Stephen explained. "For example they want us to be nimble and they have very tight specifications. That makes it difficult for our competitors."

Someone else who knows about the complexity of the fresh produce sector, from the wholesale markets through to multiple retailers, is Christopher Mack, chairman of the Fresca Group.

He has overseen the rise of the Kent-based company from a family owned company focused mainly on wholesale markets to become the largest fresh produce supplier in the UK when key joint venture businesses such as Manor Fresh, Thanet Earth and MMG Citrus are taken into account.

Moving forward Christopher and Chief Executive Ian Craig will continue to innovate to survive in the fresh produce industry, while overseeing the transformation of the company from a family-owned to an employee owned enterprise.

SOUTH DEVON ORGANIC PRODUCERS – A FRESH APPROACH TO ORGANIC GROWING

*South Devon Organic Producers picked up the Vegetable Grower of the Year award at this year's UK Grower Awards, highlighting the development and progression of organic vegetable production in the UK. **Adrian Tatum** spoke to the co-operative's General Manager, Caroline Westacott and its current Chairman, Anthony Coker.*

It is hard to know what stands out more, the vibrant biodiversity in the hedgerows or the lush, freshly drilled fields on the dramatic south-facing slopes that form part of the South Devon countryside at Home Park Farm.

The site belongs to current South Devon Organic Producers chairman, Anthony Coker and his wife Mary-Lou. Or maybe it is Mr Coker's passion for organic farming and the future direction of the South Devon Organic Producers group that really holds your attention more than anything.

Mr Coker is, in many ways, a perfect chairman for the group as he talks positively about working with the other grower members in the co-operative, an organisation that is already focused on building on the success it has had over the last two decades while maintaining and improving the level of quality produce it supplies to its customer, Riverford Organics.

In fact, the co-operative was

the brainchild of Riverford's founder, Guy Watson, who went in search of producers nearby to his farm that could supply him on a regular basis to help fulfil his ambition for Riverford to become the country's leading veg box supplier. It didn't take long for the company to achieve its ambition but perhaps what is most telling, is that South Devon Organic Producers still forms the base for Guy Watson's vegetable supply today, over twenty years since Riverford first started.

Winning the Vegetable Grower of the Year Award is testament not only to the hard work of the group and its staff but also proof that you can still have the principles of organic farming at the heart of an organisation while modernising and driving efficiencies at the same time.

"I've never trusted chemicals," says Anthony Coker. "That was one of the main reasons I wanted to start organic vegetable production when Guy



South Devon Organic Producers' Chairman Anthony Coker (left), with Co-op members David and Sheila Savage and Mary Coker.



The group is holding an open day on one of its farms on September 7th as a showcase for any potential new grower members.

Watson first approached us. I feel much more at ease dealing with natural products. Organic farming can be extremely hard work but I always feel that effort is worth it."

He says he is pleased with the development of the group over the last few years and is now looking optimistically ahead to the future. "It was such an achievement to be recognised as Vegetable Grower of the Year

and in many ways that marks the end of a chapter and the beginning of a new one. The main challenge now is to find new growers to join the group, to help re-energise us in the future and take us forward. We need younger growers to ensure the group is around in another twenty years when we have all retired," he says.

As every organic grower and producer group knows, this is



Harvesting carrots by hand.

not easy. "Organic growing is a big commitment and is hard work. There is risk also; we understand that but we are in a unique position with this group with the fact we have guaranteed supply through Riverford and that is a huge opportunity. Now is a really good time to be involved in organic production," he says.

The group is holding an open day on one of its farms on

September 7th and is hoping that this will be a real showcase for any potential new grower members. Various suppliers and associates have been invited along for the day including plant raisers, seed houses, machinery dealers, and organisations to offer advice on organic conversion. Members will also be on hand to discuss the current business model.

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General Manager Caroline Westacott, picking up the Vegetable Grower of the Year Award at this year's UK Grower Awards (courtesy Horticulture Week).

group has been all about investing in new equipment. "We realised we couldn't stand still, we had to invest in new technology to modernise our operation and more importantly to become more efficient, especially with the cost of labour," Mr Coker says. "The aim here isn't about getting rid of people. Organic farming is very labour intensive but good staff are very hard to come by and we want to keep them because having that human element is vital to any organic growers' success.

"However, there is a need among the grower members to drive efficiencies and find new ways of working to improve the quality of the crops we grow, get the best from our soils and land and keep on finding ways to grow in a sustainable way," he adds.

The last year has seen the group purchase more specialist machinery as well as a GPS guided tractor to improve accuracy, taking the ability to monitor performance through detailed data, to another level. "We are still learning," says Mr Coker, "even with all the experience we have in the group, there is still a willingness to get better and improve and the purchasing of specialist machinery has definitely helped us on that journey," he adds.

But he wants this knowledge to also extend to new growing techniques and ways of working. "There is an exciting development in the US where they have had success with growing tomatoes outside in the ground. We will be watching that closely and it

something I believe we could do here in future years."

Driving efficiencies and new product development are important elements of an ever-demanding yearly schedule for the growers. South Devon Organic Producers work closely with Riverford to meet demanding specifications and schedules with a Riverford team member visiting all the farms every week to help assess the immediate and forthcoming crop availability and to aid Riverford's planning for the weeks ahead.

Although the group has the luxury of guaranteed supply and fixed prices from Riverford it likes to keep an eye on what is going on in the organic sector in general. But should the sector be focused on price anymore? "First and foremost we should be focused on great tasting produce. That is the most important reason for us doing what we do. The price has to be attractive but ultimately we want to be as efficient as possible and organic production is still expensive with the labour costs we have," says Mr Coker. He says that during the recession while many supermarkets were withdrawing organic lines because of fears that it would be too expensive for shoppers, Riverford's sales increased.

In many ways, the key to the success of South Devon Organic Producers has been innovation. Now producing approximately 400 acres of vegetables, the group has been willing to try new ideas and new varieties and to offer something different on every annual crop programme.

Among the crops it has successfully trialled and now grows as part of its annual programme are; edamame beans, kohlrabi, golden beetroot and borlotti beans. This year it will also trial purple mange tout and flat beans.

At Home Park Farm, which has been in the Coker family since 1897, there is an air of positivity about the forthcoming season. "It is a bit cold up to now but apart from that we have been able to get on with things with not too much disruption from the weather," he says.

Another change for the group might be its structure if current funding doesn't continue after 2019. South Devon Organic Producers is funded by the Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme, which is administered through the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) but is European money. This process is managed by the cooperative's efficient General Manager, Caroline Westacott.

"We are in the middle of a five-year programme which will end in 2019. At the moment there is a lot of uncertainty as to what will happen after that for obvious reasons. There is also talk about a possible replacement scheme here to help fund growers but at this point we really don't know. EU tariffs are likely to be part of the negotiation process for new trade agreements but consumers will be averse to having their choices narrowed by high tariffs and sadly these will disproportionately hit the less well off, thus defeating our on-going mission to encourage self sufficiency of fruit and veg in the UK," says Caroline.

"We can and will continue even if we can't get any funding but we would have to have a total re-think of our strategy and structure of the group," she says. The current scheme is based on match funding and requires the group to turnover at least Euros 1 million from vegetable sales. "The funding has meant we have been able to invest in specialist machinery such as the GPS system, but it also pays for soil testing, crop covers, products such as Limex which benefits the land and other relevant items," she says.

Currently, there are five full-time and four part-time members of staff and nine seasonal workers - many of whom have been coming to the UK to work for the group for many years. They are employed by the group and then hired out to the members. The group also owns a pool of machinery and specialist machinery which can be hired out to members with or without a group-employed tractor driver on a yearly, hourly or per acre rate.

"The National Living Wage is beginning to affect things. From our new financial year (June onwards) we will be having to charge our staff out at £11 an hour to members which is expensive, especially as organic production is so labour intensive," says Ms Westacott. South Devon Organic Producers currently has 12 members, seven of which are active growers this season. The members pay a fee per acre into the co-operative and also pay a quarterly fee for machinery and administration which works out at about £115 per acre.

"Our growers are guaranteed a market and a fixed price from Riverford which is agreed in the autumn when the crop plans get released. This is quite something for any of our members to enjoy because when you are out on the open market there isn't a lot of certainty," she adds. There is even support when crops are over produced through Riverford's wholesale division or through some of the export work it does. "Even when there is a crop failure, which is very rare, there is opportunity for another grower-member to sell that crop instead."

Ms Westacott thinks the group is going from strength to strength. "It is all down to our fantastic grower members and dedicated staff. There are a few challenges on the horizon. I'd like to see more research into what we can do to further combat pest and disease and we need to continue to experiment with new varieties, as the weather is a constant challenge. But generally we are in good shape. The one thing we would like is new members and hopefully that will be the case by the end of the year."

SPROUT SUPPRESSION USING BOTH ETHYLENE AND CIPC

There is robust scientific evidence that a combination of chlorpropham (CIPC) and ethylene offers better sprout control in potatoes than either treatment alone, says Sutton Bridge Crop Storage (SBCSR) scientist Dr Glyn Harper. Frances Wright reports.

One of the reasons behind the success of long-term storage has been the ability to prevent tubers from sprouting. This has helped the industry to achieve almost year-round, reliable supply of quality potatoes for processing.

The most effective sprout suppressant is CIPC, but growers have been challenged by successive reductions in the maximum dose. As a result, AHDB Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research has stepped up to the mark to help find ways for store managers and growers to achieve the best results without exceeding

maximum residue limits (MRLs). One approach has been to improve the methods of application, while another approach has been to investigate alternative sprout suppressants alone or in combination with CIPC.

Glyn has been undertaking experiments on the suppressant ethylene, and looking at combining it with CIPC. Ethylene has long been used in the fresh pack industry but has the potential to darken fry colour in some varieties – a ‘no-no’ for the processing industry.

Trials at Sutton Bridge have shown that with ethylene alone, at 9 deg. C, sprout control in

Markies and Russet Burbank was very good and, encouragingly, there were no commercially adverse effects on fry colour. Although there were more mixed results with some other varieties, ethylene has potential as a sprout suppressant for some specific processing varieties, says Glyn.

Over a number of years, tests have also been carried out at SBCSR on processing varieties, treated with both ethylene and low concentrations of CIPC, stored at 9deg.C, and assessed for sprouting and processing colour. Stores received a single application of different doses of CIPC at the start of storage and ethylene was then applied continuously to maintain an environment of 10ppm.

Glyn says: “In the trial during 2015-16 we used three stores. In Store 1 we applied a single dose of 9g of CIPC and ethylene; in Store 2 a single dose of 16g CIPC and ethylene;



Glyn Harper has been looking at the potential of using a combination of CIPC and ethylene for sprout suppression.

and Store 3 – which was the control store – received a dose of CIPC at store loading and CIPC was then applied as and when required to control sprouting, up to the maximum dose and according to industry best practice.”

He reveals that results in Store

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2 (CIPC + ethylene) were always better than in the control Store 3 (CIPC alone). Markies and Russet Burbank – both of which are well sprout controlled by ethylene – showed even better sprout control when CIPC was in the mix.

“When Maris Piper was treated with ethylene alone, sprout control was variable but fry colours were unaffected. However, when CIPC was in the mix, sprout was very well controlled. This means a combination treatment could be suitable for Maris Piper,” says Glyn.

However, he points out, dealing with ethylene can be tricky as varietal responsiveness to the sprout suppressant varies a lot. One of the challenges is that the response of a variety to ethylene for fry colour does not appear to be linked to how well ethylene works on sprout suppression. Nevertheless, it is important that each variety is assessed for both as, even if sprout control is good, it is crucial there is no adverse effect on fry colour for stocks destined for chipping and crisping.

“While there was virtually no effect on fry colour in Russet Burbank or Maris Piper there were increases in fry colour in other varieties although they were usually well within commercially acceptable parameters.”

Chip processing is less sensitive to factors which affect fry colour than in processing for crisps. Fry colour can decline throughout storage, so the longer the crop is stored, the darker the colour.

Glyn explains: “In our trials,

Results of ethylene and ethylene/CIPC on popular processing varieties	
Ethylene	Ethylene/CIPC
<i>Maris Piper</i>	<i>Maris Piper</i>
Fry colour: No significant effect	Fry colour: no significant effect
Sprout control: Variable	Sprout control: Good
<i>Markies</i>	<i>Markies</i>
Fry colour: No significant effect	Fry colour: No significant effect
Sprout control: good	Sprout control: good
<i>Ramos</i>	<i>Ramos</i>
Fry colour: Darker fry colour especially during longer storage	Fry colour: Darker fry colour especially during longer storage
Sprout control: Acceptable	Sprout control: good
<i>Russet Burbank</i>	<i>Russet Burbank</i>
Fry colour: No significant effect	Fry colour: No significant effect
Sprout control: good	Sprout control: good
<i>Innovator</i>	<i>Innovator</i>
Fry colour: No significant effect	Fry colour: No significant effect
Sprout control: Variable	Sprout control: good

For the reports go to: <https://potatoes.ahdb.org.uk>

chip fry colour with potatoes treated with ethylene was not significantly different to potatoes treated with CIPC. However, we found the fry colour could be darker for some crisping varieties, especially when they had been stored for longer.

“It is important for us to become smarter in our ability to store processing varieties, making use of the potential of ethylene and other suppressants. Using CIPC in combination with other suppressants could help to prevent exceedance while maintaining efficacy.

“Moreover, as it is even more effective in combination with ethylene, this strategy could provide a back-up and extended control to a reduced overall dose of CIPC. This will allow growers to store over the long term and avoid reaching MRLs. The next step is to transfer this research from small scale stores

to large commercial enterprises.”

‘Smelling’ soft rots in potato stores

Soft rot can be a real challenge in potato stores. Once the disease has become established, it can progress very rapidly and, if uncontrolled, can cause significant losses. Therefore, early detection of potential problems through monitoring the health of stored tubers is key to maintaining quality. Dr James Covington, an Associate Professor at the School of Engineering at the University of Warwick, and PhD student Massimo Rutolo, have been developing an electronic nose capable of detecting the volatiles released by rots.

“One of the criteria for good storage is the ability to detect low levels of rots in a large volume of potatoes so the store manager can either decide to change in-store conditions

and/or sell the potatoes promptly,” says James.

He takes a pragmatic view; by using off-the-shelf commercial sensors and then further optimising these, it is possible to reduce the development time of any final commercial product. To this end, he has



James Covington has been developing sensors for detecting rots in potato stores.

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Soft rot infection can enter via lenticels (Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research).

been trialling commercial sensors to discover the secrets of getting them to work in store environments.

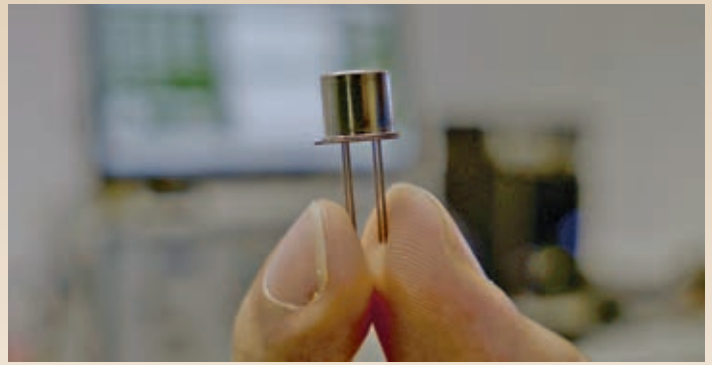
“Our trials using the research facilities at Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research have worked well and we can now think of testing in larger scale stores where farmers can integrate them into their store management system,” he says.

It will provide further environmental information rather than a single tool, he emphasises, and will help store managers get strategic decisions right and therefore impact on the bottom line.

Moreover, he adds, by choosing the right type of sensors, any final unit should have a low price point.

The sensors work by sampling the store air and capture volatiles produced from anywhere within the store. They can be placed within the circulating ventilation system, in boxes or between the stacks or even within the bulk pile. This means they should work in both box and bulk stores.

Rots are one of the biggest causes of profit loss from storage, and the ease and speed of which they can move from one potato to another



Smart sensors like these are tipped to play an important role in the potato stores of the future.

makes control quite challenging. Therefore, using additional sensors strategically placed amongst the potatoes throughout the store to help identification of problem areas could make a real difference.

“These sensors detect where the rot is within the store, guiding store managers on which area to deal with as a priority,” he says. Moreover, the sensors have the potential to detect volatiles from other tuber diseases and conditions.

“Perhaps the sensors could also be tweaked for other store needs. For example, they could be used to monitor sprouting, so a timely top-up application of sprout control can be made before sprouting occurs.”

temperatures mean that rots can develop more quickly in some varieties and they can become a real issue which hits the grower in the pocket.”

Usually the first signs of rot are detected by the store manager’s nose. But a sensor which is sufficiently sensitive to pick up a slight trace of volatiles released by rots before they become a detectable smell would give time for the store manager to increase ventilation and prevent having to move the crop early.

“Processing systems depend on technology and sensors are already being used in stores to monitor temperature, air and humidity to fine-tune environmental control, and this is another which will help our industry keep on top of its game.”

Footnote: Results from the work on sprout suppression will be displayed at the forthcoming AHDB Postharvest Showcase event being held at Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research on Thursday 27 July. James Covington will also be a seminar speaker at the event. To register and access further details go to:

www.potatoes.ahdb.org.uk/events/postharvest-showcase.

Electronic nose a step upward for potato stores

An electronic ‘nose’ will make useful addition to the store manager’s toolkit, says store manager Tim Kitson of Potato Solutions. He expects it to be particularly useful in stores for the processing sector, as they are kept at warmer temperatures (around 8 deg.C) than those for the fresh pack market (2-3 deg.C).

Tim says: “These warmer



Tim Kitson says prompt detection of rots will help store managers keep on top of their game.

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BOB THOMAS – A LIFETIME OF SALAD CROP INNOVATION

by Ian Gillott

Earlier this year, Bob Thomas was presented with an award recognising his Outstanding Contribution to the Industry at the Grower of the Year Awards. The award recognised Bob's immense contribution to the UK horticultural industry and to the salad industry in particular.

When he eventually retires from his role as Chairman of the Kent-based salad company, Intercrop, Bob can reflect on a lifetime's involvement in the salad industry. An involvement which has seen many innovations which he introduced and that have had a significant influence on the direction the salad industry has taken over the years.

Perhaps his most notable achievement was his role in the introduction of Iceberg lettuce into the UK.

His interest in horticulture really began when helping his father - a country clergyman in Worcestershire - in the rectory's extensive vegetable garden. This experience obviously made an impression on Bob, as it was fundamental in establishing a lifelong passion for horticulture.

To gain experience on a commercial holding, he enlisted as a student on Captain J.F. Bomford's Springhill Farm at Fladbury. This consisted of some 600 acres and formed part of the Worcester Bishopric Estates. Captain Bomford was one of the most substantial and influential farmers in Worcestershire.

Bob points out that he had to pay twenty-five pounds a quarter for his apprenticeship!

On his first day on the farm, he was given a brush and shovel plus a wheelbarrow and told to muck out five-hundred pigs. Hardly the introduction to horticulture he had been expecting! However, as his clergyman father had always kept a couple of cows on land adjoining his rectory to supplement his meagre stipend, livestock was not a new experience for Bob. The work with livestock was short-lived and he soon progressed to the horticultural side of Bomford's business - including forty acres

of hops, which came under Bob's jurisdiction.

He finally rose to the position of farm manager, a post which he held from 1968 until 1972. During his time as farm manager, he recalls employing some of the first Concordia students. They were weeding carrots after an application of TVO (tractor vapourising oil) had failed to control some of the weeds. The students were only allowed to stay on the farm for three weeks before returning home. The boys were separated from the girls - how times have changed!

By this time, Bomfords had amalgamated with J.M.Stokes. Maurice Stokes, of Severn Stoke, near Worcester, and Captain James Bomford were great friends and when the two companies amalgamated, James became Managing Director of the new company. The amalgamation worked well as Stokes had a strong merchanting arm.

Stokes also produced and sold a very popular lettuce herbicide - JMS No. 6 - which many of The Vegetable Farmer's older readers will remember. It was the most widely used lettuce herbicide throughout the 70's and early 80's.

Innovation always played a huge part at Stokes Bomford. The first hop picking machine was installed in 1946 and the first hydro-cooler was built in 1958. Part of the World War Two PLUTO pipeline - that carried fuel under the channel from the UK to France - was used at the Springhill farm, as a mains irrigation pipe. By 1956, underground mains and risers had been installed on the farm.

The new irrigation system was demonstrated on a number of farm visits by local growers and students, who, Bob says, were suitably impressed.



Bob Thomas.

In 1972, Bob Thomas moved to Nackington Farms in Kent, initially to take charge of hop production. In addition to 150 acres of top fruit, the farm had 500 ewes and also produced potatoes, blackcurrants and cherries in addition to 10 acres of flat lettuce. This lettuce crop was marketed by Saphir.

Hearing about lettuce production in the USA, Bob, along with the growing manager of Bettshanger Farms, Howard Carr, decided to fly to the States to look at lettuce production in California. They initially met with Bud Antle in Salinas and Ed Ryder. Bud Antle's company was the biggest and most successful producer of lettuce in California. Ed Ryder worked for the US Department of Agriculture, as a breeder and geneticist.

During their first visit to Salinas, Bob and Howard were flown down to Yuma where Bud Antle's company had established another production area to complement their production in Salinas. This was the first time they had seen rig-harvesting of lettuce on such a massive scale.

Inspired by what they had seen on their travels, the couple spent the journey home on the floor of the aircraft, designing lettuce-harvesting rigs!

The original aim of producing Iceberg lettuce on the west coast of America, where the climate was conducive to lettuce production, was that there was a demand for a lettuce which would travel across America and arrive in perfect condition in cities on America's east coast.

Iceberg lettuce had been grown in California since the 1930's. It had been shipped to the East Coast by train, packed in ice. Ice was then replaced by vacuum cooling. This was a big step forward as it removed the field heat from the lettuce.

Bob and Howard were then left to set about investigating vacuum cooling as this was obviously the way forward to ensure good shelf-life. It was at this time that Ray Jeffs of L.O Jeffs in Lancashire was also investigating vacuum cooling, and extensive telephone conversations between the pioneers of this new technique eventually led to the building of the first vacuum cooler. As a



Bob Thomas receiving his Outstanding Contribution to the Industry Award at the recent UK Grower Awards. (Photo courtesy of Horticulture Week).

result of the new technology, a seven-day shelf-life could be offered to the customer.

Bob and Howard established a brand name, 'Kingcrisp,' and began Iceberg production in 1978 operating as a joint venture between the Nackington and Bettshanger farms as Kent Salads.

Originally they grew Penlake varieties, but these were prone to coning, especially in hot weather. However, progress was rapid. They dealt with an American seed company called Red Coach, who introduced them to the new Ed Ryder bred variety, Salinas. This introduction was an enormous breakthrough in the production of Iceberg lettuce and it could be said to have revolutionised Iceberg quality.

In 1977 Marcus Sieff had also been to the States to see lettuce production and on his return encouraged the newly-formed Kent Salads to market a proportion of the crop through Marks and Spencer.

The rigs, which were designed and produced by Bob and Howard, were very much ahead of their time as all operations were carried out in the field prior to cooling. The overwrapping included codes which identified which rig had cut and wrapped the lettuce; traceability ahead of its time.

By 1981 Kent Salads were producing 1000 acres of Iceberg on nine rigs. The finished product was packed in either 18's, 24's or 36's. The price for a box of 24 icebergs was £12!

Bob Thomas and Howard Carr continued to visit the States every year to keep up-to-date with the latest varieties and harvesting techniques. They

were also growing 300 acres of salad onions which were tray-packed and marketed exclusively through M & S.

The farm was also growing 250 acres of calabrese along with 200 acres of sweetcorn and 500 acres of sprouts. 1984 saw the introduction of endive and continental lettuce along with the 'in-house' development of washed bagged salads.

In 1991 Geest bought Kent Salads. Bob Thomas brokered a deal with Lord Northbourne to farm the land around Bettshanger and a new company, Intercrop, was formed. The portfolio of salad crops was widened to include products such as salad rocket and spinach along with herbs and oriental brassicas.

In 1993, Geest asked Intercrop to look at overseas production in order to guarantee a twelve-month supply of salads. Bob initially looked at Portugal but finished up by deciding that the Murcia region in Spain would be most suitable.

Initially, they partnered with a Spanish company but after two years decided to progress on their own. They now grow over one-thousand acres of spinach and salad crops during the winter for export to the UK.

Geest were bought out by Bakkavor in 2011. It was at this time that Bob Thomas engineered a management buy-out. Bob believes this has been very successful and he is delighted that Intercrop is going from strength to strength. He maintains that he is finally retiring - but one thing is pretty certain - he will maintain a deep interest in the business he helped to found.

STANHILL FARM – FINDING SUCCESS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON

by Bill Sherer

"We are fully committed to serving our high-density population, customer base with quality vegetables through our Farm Shop, delivered box scheme and on-line," says Toby Williams of Stanhill Farm, Wilmington, near Dartford in Kent. The 150 acre farm is one of just a few close to the capital, and is only 17 miles from central London.

In marketing terms being close to so many current and potential customers is a distinct business advantage," he says. "It also means we are frequently in face-to-face contact with those end users who purchase our produce and today that is becoming increasingly important. For grower and customer alike, feedback is the name of the game."

When he took over as tenant at Stanhill Farm in 2004 the emphasis was on growing cabbages specifically for Waitrose, whilst courgettes and runner beans were produced for the wholesale markets. Toby's brother Max joined the business in 2006 and now has responsibility for all retail and sales aspects of the business.

To match consumer preferences, a cross section of different brassicas are grown at Stanhill Farm. These include: Summer, winter and pointed cabbage, purple sprouting broccoli, Brussels sprouts, runner beans, Tuscan kale, calabrese and spring greens.

The breakdown of the various vegetables grown and their acreage is: Garden Peas and Broad Beans (2 acres); Sweet Corn (6.75); Runner Beans

(stick) (2.5); Courgettes & Marrows (4); Parsnips (0.25); Carrots (1); Leeks (0.25); Purple Sprouting Broccoli (1.25); Cabbage/Savoy/Greens/Kale/Calabrese (10); Brussels Sprouts (1.25) and Pumpkins & Squash 2.5 acres, making an overall acreage of 31.75 acres. Purple carrots, a new introduction, are also proving popular through all Stanhill Farm's outlets.

The remaining 118 acres



Toby Williams (left) with his brother Max.

grows fruit including raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, redcurrants, and blackcurrants. The arable acreage consists mainly of winter and spring wheat and field peas.

Farm Shop and Veg Boxes

"Our Farm Shop opened in October 2009," explains Toby. It

stocks a cross section of vegetables with much of the produce coming from Stanhill Farm. To meet overall demand some is sourced from local farms with the balance coming from London wholesale markets. "Our strategy is to beat supermarket quality and be competitively priced when and wherever possible."

Stanhill Vegetable boxes are delivered within a ten mile radius of the Farm. The aim is to offer the same choice here as



Stanhill Farm grows 2.5 acres of runner beans.

in the Farm Shop, and on-line, with the main emphasis wherever possible on home grown produce.

PYO

"Our PYO has always been popular. It makes a great day out for customers who live in the built-up areas around Dartford," says Toby. The broad bean and pea PYO seasons run during the months of July and August with the sweetcorn starting in August and finishing in October. Pumpkins are picked during October ready for

Halloween in November. Opening times for PYO enthusiasts are Monday to Saturday 9.00am to 5.30pm and Sundays 10.00am to 4.00pm. Last entries to all PYO units is 45 minutes before closing time.

"We have also devised and started a Maize Maze which is proving popular with all age groups," explains Toby. A printed Maize Maze map helps participants meet the challenge, and provides a souvenir of their endeavours. "Social media and word of mouth has brought many people to the Maize Maze," he says. The unit has provided an added business benefit with consumers spending more time at Stanhill Farm, meaning they may buy additional produce during their visit.

Employees

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to our Lithuanian employees who have done vital work over many years for us at Stanhill Farm." The team of ten are in situ from July to October covering all aspects of fruit and vegetable growing and harvesting. At the time of my visit two or three Lithuanians were already on site and had been working since early March. "Our successful Lithuanian Supervisor has been with us for the last four years," says Toby.

The Farm Shop is managed by Alison Hines, a full-time employee since 2005. She also has responsibility for secretarial duties within the business. Debbie Bond is a part time Farm Shop employee, while her colleague Tom Steer has full time

responsibility for Vegetable boxes and provides Farm Shop input as required. "We also employ additional part time, local support staff at seasonal peak times and particularly so during some of our busiest times on Saturdays and Sundays."

NFU commitment

For several years, Toby Williams was Branch Chairman of Dartford Farmers & North West Kent Growers, a specialist NFU Group, with offices in Meopham, near Dartford. And for the last two years he has been Deputy Chairman of the Kent Branch of the NFU. This winter he will become Chairman of the county branch, a senior position which he will hold for two years.

The role will be a demanding one, not least with Brexit negotiations in full flow. "The future of our adaptable Lithuanian employees is already focusing my mind on a key part of these vital negotiations and I am determined to play my part to ensure that Kent farms, together with other UK agricultural and horticultural growing counties, will have access to essential temporary migrant labour when necessary, to successfully grow and harvest fruit and vegetables for our UK consumers," he says.

It is likely that his NFU responsibilities will take Toby to London on a regular basis. With so much at stake during his two year term as Kent County Chairman, and with an enforced but very necessary absence from the farm for long periods, brother Max will hold the fort.

Political involvement

Toby Williams is a Conservative party member and has regular contact with Gareth Johnson, the Conservative MP for Dartford. "I have always been very interested in politics," he says, "and I know that Gareth finds his visits to Stanhill Farm very helpful in better understanding the various challenges faced by growers such as myself. Equally, it ensures that I am able to raise any key points face-to-face with him. This is going to become doubly important as the two year period of Brexit negotiations are already under way in earnest."

Community support

The Williams brothers support local charities and resident's

associations. "In today's business environment, social responsibility has an important role to play alongside good, bottom line results," says Toby.

The business has been involved with the Schools to Market project run by the charity School Food Matters, to improve understanding by educating children about where their food comes from.

Visits to Stanhill Farm have been made by pupils from Shackwell Primary School in Hackney, and inner city children from Camden schools who had not appreciated where their food came from or how it was grown.

Toby Williams is also a member of The Canterbury Farmers Club, where meetings and speakers are relevant to the business and networking opportunities are useful.

Stanhill Farm are members of Southern Farmers Ltd buying group and the Produced in Kent organisation.

The future

Stanhill Farm's key marketing asset is that it is situated in a high-density population area, housing many potential new customers.

"Currently our Farm Shop has a throughput of about 700 customers a week and we know from our research that there is an excellent potential to offer greater choice to new and existing customers," says Toby. However, the current shop would probably need to be expanded in size and shape to cope with the increased customer throughput.

"Equally important is that new, wholesale business customers are approaching us direct through existing and satisfied, current customers and by word of mouth. That has to be good for future business" he says.

Toby Williams, who has always been an early riser, starting work at 5.30-6.00am each morning, has built up a very successful business with the support and input of brother Max and a dedicated team.

His considerable achievements to date within The National Farmers at a comparatively young age suggest that he will progress even further in the future both with his own business and as an industry leader.



Toby Williams (right) with his Farm Shop employees.

SECURING CHEMICAL WEED CONTROL OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

by Professor Geoff Dixon

Herbicides offer an effective means of weed control, but, because of adverse environmental effects and potential problems for human health the spectrum of available chemicals has been severely curtailed.

Substituting non-chemical weed control (see May 2017 *Vegetable Farmer*) is an increasingly useful alternative, but targeted non-residual chemicals using minimal quantities of active ingredients remain an essential element of successful integrated crop husbandry.

Growers' needs

The effects of increased regulation were highlighted by Janet Williams, Bayer's Regulatory Affairs Manager, at AHDB's 2015 Peterborough Conference. Registration success for agrochemicals in the 1960's was in the ratio of 1:11,000 molecules tested. This escalated to 1:150,000 by the 2000's with a price tag of \$300 million per molecule. Consequently, agrochemical companies have concentrated their investments on large acreage crops.

Recognising the consequences of a declining chemical armoury resulted in the Horticultural Development Council (now AHDB-H) initiating the SOLA (Specific Off-Label Approval) scheme. Managed by Vivian Powell and her colleague Bolette Neve this is a flagship success. Without it, as Phillip Effingham (Chairman of the Vegetable Consultants Association, VCA) commented, "many crops simply could not be grown."

The scheme is now called the



Vivian Powell.

Extension of Authorisation for Minor Uses (EAMU) which more closely reflects its objectives. As Vivian Powell explained, "AHDB-H works with consultants, panels and grower associations reviewing the data available for older actives; determining which can hopefully be retained; identifying important new uses; and pre-empting the loss of actives -solving problems ahead of their development."

Vivian Powell also emphasised that "actives can be lost in a relatively short space of time with little notice." Countering this requires a reserve of materials. Current details of herbicides available for field vegetables can be found at:

www.horticulture.ahdb.org.uk/latest-eamus-and-updates.

Growers can also gain information from: www.pesticides.gov.uk which links into the Chemical Regulations Directorate (CRD) or search for further information from:

www.secure.pesticides.gov.uk/offlabels/search.asp

Problem solving

Needs for plugging gaps in available agrochemicals resulted in the Sustainable Crop and Environment Protection Targeted Research for Edibles (SCEPTRE) programme. During 2011 to 2014 SCEPTRE ran 21 weed trials for field vegetables, with special concern for the loss of linuron and working on solutions for weed control in baby leaf spinach, rocket, swede and mizuna. Current major problem weeds include: annual meadow grass, chickweed, fat hen, groundsel, mayweed, red dead nettle and speedwell. Sceptre ended in 2014 and AHDB-H's 2015 Conference confirmed the need for continued work.

SCEPTREplus lead by Joe Martin builds on the previous work. Joe said; "SCEPTREplus has a budget



Joe Martin is leading SCEPTREplus.

of £1.4 million over 4 years with aims of assessing new chemicals and uses or changed applications." Weed control is a priority area for field vegetables he added. The main contractor is Agri-foods Solutions with sub-contractors such as Warwick University Crop Centre, NIAB-EMR, RSK-ADAS and Stockbridge Technology Centre (STC) working with targets set by the AHDB-H Crop Panels.

Control of groundsel and black grass are prime objectives because of their importance in salads, baby leaves and sweet corn. Weed control trials for carrot crops are starting in 2017 with growers' field days planned for later in this season.

Current provisions

All the major agrochemical companies are collaborating in the EAMU and Sceptre initiatives within their commercial and regulatory constraints. Bayer's vegetable herbicide offering is based on a permutation of the ioxynil molecule in the now revoked Totril. Tim Lacey (Bayer's Campaign Manager for Fruit, Vegetables and Biologicals) said there is an EAMU for the herbicide Buctril (bromoxynil) for use on bulb onion, salad onion, garlic, shallot, chive, asparagus and leek crops.

He commented further that, "Bayer is conscious of the implications of losing linuron for carrot, pea, bean and potato crops and these requirements are guiding our research effort."

Products available from BASF were identified by Rob Storer their Business Development Manager. Currently, Stomp Aqua

(pendimethalin) can be used on outdoor lettuce, controlling annual meadow grass, chickweed, red dead nettle and speedwell.

There are now differing post-harvest intervals depending on the dose rate when applied pre-transplanting.

Laser (cyclohexdim) can be used in celeriac, horseradish, Jerusalem

artichoke, red beet, salsify and turnip crops for control of cultivated oats, wild oats, volunteer barley, Canary grass, Italian ryegrass, loose silky bent, perennial ryegrass, sterile brome, volunteer wheat, black bent (red top), onion couch (false oat grass), creeping bent and common couch. There may be an extension granted for its use in root crops.

Gaining EAMU approval for Wing P (dimethenamid-P and pendimethalin) is considered by Vivian Powell as "one of the Sceptre/EAMU programme's biggest successes." Wing P is used on field brassicas, salad and bulb onions and outdoor lettuce, for control of annual weeds.

BASF also has herbicides specifically developed for use in brassica crops of which Springbok (dimethenamid-p and metazachlor) has a label approval for a wide range of field brassica crops such as cabbage, cauliflower, calabrese, Brussels sprouts, kale, collards and a range of oriental cabbages.

Simon Jackson Syngenta's Vegetable Specialist in the UK and Eire, said; "Syngenta continues its very active collaboration with AHDB-H developing EAMU applications and with SCEPTRE Plus project leaders highlighting molecules for inclusion in their trials."

Currently, Defy (prosulcarb) is available for carrot, parsnip, leek, transplanted bulb onion sets, direct drilled bulb onion, direct drilled garlic, direct drilled shallot, celery, direct drilled and transplanted celeriac crops. Defy is active against broad leaved weeds such as cleavers, fat hen, knotgrass mayweed and annual



Gareth Jones, Headland/FMC's Technical Manager.

asparagus and full label approval for use on bulb onion and carrot crops.

Headland/FMC's Technical Manager Gareth Jones, said their herbicide with EAMU approval is Gamit (clomazone). It can be used on broccoli and other brassicas, baby leaf, celery, fennel, courgette, runner beans, French beans, asparagus, celeriac, spinach. "This herbicide is very useful against cleavers, chickweed and hedge mustard," he

commented.

grasses as specified on the carrot EAMU. He also pointed out that Dual Gold (S-metolachlor) has EAMU approvals for use on bulb onion, garlic, shallot, red beet, swede, turnip, broccoli, calabrese, cauliflower, Brussels sprout, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, collard, kale, dwarf French bean and runner bean, edible podded pea and vining pea crops.

Dual Gold has activity against annual grasses and broadleaved weeds. Fusilade Max (fluazifop-P-butyl) has EAMU approvals for use on shallot, cabbage,

Shark (carfenfrazone-ethyl) also has broad on-label approval for weed control one month pre-planting of any crop and has EAMU approval for weed control in asparagus. Gareth Jones reminded growers that "there is a stewardship scheme in place guiding growers in best use practices for clomazone," (see www.headland-ag.co.uk).

Outside the box

New engineering approaches for chemical weed control are being developed by Dr Alistair

Murdoch, at the University of Reading School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, APD. These apply carefully targeted droplets of systemically active total herbicides onto the leaves of weeds avoiding crop foliage using the "eyeSpot" system.

The "eyeSpot" uses "a point and shoot approach" which places microlitre droplets of herbicide with 0.1% adjuvant (AS 500 SL).

This technique eliminates herbicidal spray drift and greatly reduces run-off into the soil or onto crop plants and non-target organisms. Dr Murdoch said it is "an effective and efficient means of controlling weeds where few or no post-emergence herbicide options are possible."

Co-funded by AHDB-H, the Douglas Bomford Trust and the University, Dr Murdoch uses crop fields for his tests, where there is already very accurate information defining the placement of seedlings or transplants so that these can be avoided when spraying.

Target seedling weeds receive

droplets of herbicide applied via an "applicator" which places them directly onto leaves from where the chemical is translocated into the plants. Quick acting, systemic, non-selective herbicides such as glyphosate or other similar molecules are essential for this technique

Discrimination between crop and weed foliage is achieved by using information defining plant position in the field and colorimetric identifiers which discriminate between weeds and crop plants.

The need for chemical herbicides for use in specialist crops such as field vegetables will continue into the foreseeable future. AHDB-H's SCEPTRE plus and EAMU programmes are currently providing solutions although these are far from comprehensive and depend on the continuation of funding. Meanwhile, Engineering developments such as "eyespot" offering weed control using non-selective herbicides can give growers an alternative approach.

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NEW FOUR ROW POTATO PLANTING RIG BOOTS OUTPUT

Cutting potato establishment costs while increasing output without compromising yield or quality, has been a key focus for Lincolnshire potato grower Will Gagg of RJ and AE Godfrey's Eastoft Grange Farm near Scunthorpe.

With a responsibility for 830 acres of maincrop potatoes grown for the pre-pack market, Mr Gagg believes he is well on course for finding the solution, with the 2017 season being the fifth since changing his planting regime.

Despite average yields dipping to 16t/ac in 2015 the farm's five year average is 22t/ac. Varieties include Maris Piper, Nectar, Melody, Sapphire, Desiree, Safari and Estima, which suit the predominantly silty soils with irrigation.

Mr Gagg says that traditionally the planting operation on the farm involved a six or seven pass system starting with the plough followed by deep ridging, two passes with a bedtiller, then declodding and finally planting.

After the appalling weather conditions at planting in 2012 Mr Gagg realised that he had to find a system that would mean he could decide when the best time was to plant rather than being dictated to by the weather due to the limited

number of dry days at planting.

As a result he approached Grimme in 2013 to see what options were potentially available to boost output and wrestle back control from the weather, bearing in mind at the time he operated a 2-row system. It was suggested that output could be improved by switching to a 4-row planting system.

"We had also seen a 4-row system working in Holland which was impressive, so we developed our own with input from Grimme," says Mr Gagg. "This year will be our fourth season planting potatoes based on a 4-row system. We have easily reduced our establishment costs by £150/ac without compromising yields, and our output is now about 45ac/day with an average forward speed of 7kph. In 2015 we planted 450 acres with one machine which took 18 days."

For the new regime to work land is still ploughed early when it is dry and left to frost mould to help break the soils down

into a fine tilth as well as bury trash and weeds. At planting a Baselier with subsoiler tines prepares the ground straight in front of the planter to a depth of 40cm, which leaves a 'flat cultivated top no-bed scenario'. The cultivator operates around the clock using two drivers working in 12 hour shifts.

"On some of our lighter soils we don't even need to go in with a Baselier," says Mr Gagg. "Instead we just go straight in with our planting rig onto frosted plough work. A key difference is that we are not bringing up soil from deep down," he says. "We are only interested in using the top frost moulded soil. With a lot of the deep ridging systems used on farms, we feel it creates a plough like environment which is not conducive to establishing a good crop.

"Our bedtiller/planting combination produces loose soil and light seedbed," he explains. "Hydraulic ridge pressure with 'Kit-Kat' ridging hoods on the



Lincolnshire potato grower Will Gagg.

planter, adjustable from the cab, helps to keep a regular flow of soil continually moving through it. Running the planter on the flat, un-ridged soil means we can pull it from a central position, rather than offset. We aim for about 6.5-7 inches of depth."

Replacing the old 2-row planter is a Grimme GL430T trailed 4-row planter fitted with a GR360 bedtiller/rotary cultivator and various other appliances to provide Amistar, nematicide and liquid fertiliser,



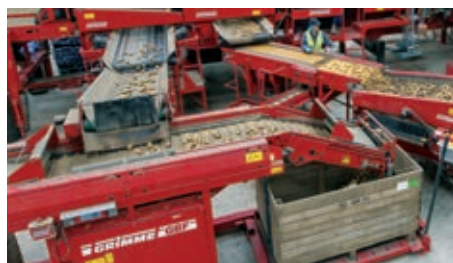
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One of the farm's Grimme GL430T trailed 4-row potato planters in action.

which is pulled by a low ground pressure John Deere 360hp crawler.

"The GL430T planter is simple to use," says Mr Gagg. "And we have had very few breakdowns – this is a key point when under pressure during planting, where downtime is not an option. "The only testing incident we have had was when an axle broke in the morning, but by 3pm Grimme had got us up and running again."

By planting in the right conditions he says there has been a marked decrease in disease incidence, especially Rhizoctonia that can easily reduce yields by 4t/ac. Crop health has also improved because potatoes are being planted into warmer soils.

"When we switched planter we opted for a cup planter because we wanted to achieve specific spacing and in our opinion this can't be achieved

with a belt planter. The only downside is that we have to have one staff member permanently carting seed to keep the planter going. We operate with two high tip trailers with one always in the field."

Mr Gagg also operates another two Grimme GL430T 4-row planters. The original planter with tiller and front mounted liquid fertiliser applicator plants 550 acres in North Lincolnshire, East Yorkshire and the Isle of Axholme. A second GL430T rig with GR360 rotary tiller plants 250 acres in the Holbeach area. A third GL430T planter without a tiller currently is used to plant 300 acres on rented land on the Wolds.

The GR360 rotary tiller hangs independently on a three point linkage in front of the planter and can be lifted and lowered hydraulically from the cab. If the planter hits a heavy patch in the field, the depth can be adjusted accordingly. Two extra wheels on the planter help take the weight of the tiller.

"Any additional appliances,

such as for Amistar, nematicide and liquid fertiliser, are all bolted on to the main planter frame without any requirement for gas welding," says Mr Gagg. "The tillering, planting, Amistar and nematicide application plus liquid fertiliser placement are all done in one pass now. It has so far proven to be a great success."

Despite its size – easily 40ft in length with full planting kit and front mounted liquid fertiliser tank – Mr Gagg says it is still very manoeuvrable because the GL430 has independent steering. He also says that there has been a massive fuel saving, with the crawler using between 450-550l/day.

"It's a big planting rig but the only real downside is the fact that the cab is like a spaceship inside with a host of individual controls to run different appliances such as VC50 for the planter, a Chafer/Horstine control for liquid fertiliser, a TMAir control for nematicide, an AS120 Amistar applicator and all the GPS electronics."

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