



Complexity of soil debated at Eastern Vegetable Conference

March 2012

A speaker from expert vegetable grower Produce World has given insight into new developments in soil management at a conference organised by Waitrose and chaired by Dr Simon Bowen, Produce World's Agronomy Director.

Guy Thallon, Project Manager for Produce World's Soil-for-Life, demonstrated some of the innovative work that is central to Produce World's agenda at the Waitrose Eastern Vegetable Conference on March 13th. Soil-for-Life focuses on the challenge of managing the massive complexity of soil. At a farm level this variability is managed on a field by field basis, using fertilisers, irrigation, pesticides, cultivations and other management practices to condition the soil for growing vegetables.

Soil-for-life is all about big data, collating and integrating datasets to answer whether current practices allow the industry to truly optimise the use of soils. Central to the success of Soil-for-life is the involvement of Produce World growers and their farm data holdings. The Soil-for-life grower portal (currently in development) will provide a web-based platform for users to upload data, view map layers, run queries on the aggregated Soil-for-life database and access knowledge-transfer material.

Thallon commented: "The Waitrose Eastern Vegetable Conference is a key event and a great arena for Produce World to present the Soil-for-Life project. This project represents a significant step towards big data approaches in soil science research. It will give us better access to the data required to understand how to quantify soil health, whilst providing a unique knowledge transfer mechanism to promote best practice back to land managers, farmers and advisors."

Soil management was further debated at the Waitrose Eastern Vegetable Conference with talks delivered on soil threats and opportunities for the Eastern region and soil compaction in a vegetable rotation. Water challenges for the Eastern region catchments were also considered by Dr. Rob Lillywhite from the Warwick Crop Centre and Jim Shanks, a dairy farmer, reviewed alternative energy options for farmers.

The agenda also included using organic amendments for soil improvement and nutrition and agronomic benefits and challenges. Anaerobic digestion and integration in farming systems were also discussed by leading names in the industry. Pesticides had the final word as the future availability of crop protection products and alternative on-farm strategies were presented by Chris Wallwork of Agrii.

Speaking after the event Emma Garrod, Produce World's Research Agronomist, said: "Several growers commented how dynamic and thought provoking the conference was, adding that it was a useful time away from the business to consider the challenges the industry faces, in particular soil, water and energy."

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Notes for Editors

Produce World is one of the largest expert growers and suppliers of high quality fresh vegetables in Europe. It is a privately owned business, founded by the Burgess family in 1898, and the family ethos and values remain in place. The Produce World business is customer and category focused and it is an industry leader in sustainable and responsible agronomy, growing and lean supply chain management. Its sourcing is a combination of produce from its own farms, joint-ventures, and collaborative working with dedicated grower groups, supplying a variety of root vegetables, potatoes, brassicas, alliums, and organic produce to leading retailers, food service and manufacturing customers.

Produce World Group companies include Produce World Solanum Ltd, Produce World IFP Ltd, Produce World RBO Ltd, Produce World Rustler Ltd, Produce World Marshalls Ltd, Agromark SA, and Growing Trust with Las Lomas (joint venture).

The company received the Waitrose Technical Excellence Award in June 2011, as well as the re:fresh Innovation of the Year and Packer of the Year awards in May 2011. Its Growing Trust CSR programme, established in 2007, prioritises Responsible Sourcing, along with Environmental Stewardship, Community Impact and Workplace Culture.

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