

And then there were four!

There are few multi-million pound projects that reach completion within deadlines and on budget. The new £17m greenhouse at Thanet Earth is a remarkable building; a great example of collaborative design and construction. The first tomatoes from Thanet Growers One (TG1) at Thanet Earth are now being harvested, packed and making their way onto retail shelves nationwide.



TG1 covers approximately 8 hectares, and is dedicated entirely to the sustainable production of the very finest speciality tomatoes. This greenhouse includes all the very latest equipment and technology available, all designed around the principles of efficiency and sustainability.

The Thanet Earth tomato growing expert, Gert van Straalen explains: "For me, having all the precision controls within this greenhouse is key to realising my goal of maximum productivity alongside the best possible quality and flavour of our fruit. I'm confident that the equipment and system within this



*Gert van Straalen, managing director of
Thanet Growers One Ltd*

greenhouse is the envy of every commercial grower right now. We've taken everything we've learnt from our previous experience of growing on this site and around the world and we've made even further improvements."

For its first season TG1 is producing six speciality tomato varieties for the multiples. It's also home to some closely-guarded trial varieties that emerged from the site's innovation work and the Thanet Earth Discovery Fellowship project with Hadlow College.

Remaining true to the principles of 'natural' growing techniques, the greenhouse is buzzing with insect life – from the bees that pollinate the flowers overhead to the miniature insects placed among the plants to protect them from pest attack. As with all greenhouses at Thanet Earth, rainwater capture and a clever water recycling system provides around 80% of the water needed by the plants. The heat and CO₂ come courtesy of the CHP electricity generation units in the greenhouse. This technology provides a valuable income stream through the sale of its electricity and helps ensure a consistency and added control over cost of production. The site now boasts a total generating capacity of 20MW.

Offering consumers a British winter tomato range produced with the help of artificial lights is a core part of the Thanet Earth proposition, and grow lights are scheduled for installation later this year. Production of tomatoes in TG1 is to be a 52 week operation, providing year-round work for some 100 people across the greenhouse and packing factory.

The Discovery Zone is a new feature for Thanet Earth within TG1. Given the risk of disease introduction from visitors, the greenhouses remain an area closed to visitors. However, at TG1 a new, first floor education and meeting space has been set aside to help Thanet Earth introduce more people to their growing system without putting the plants at risk. Approaching its final fit-out, the room will feature a full demonstration kitchen along with educational exhibits. For retail customers, for schools and colleges, this is one way in which the company is further demonstrating its commitment to helping connect consumers more closely with their food.

TG1 is unusual in that the greenhouse is a venture owned jointly by the project partners (Fresca Group, Rainbow UK, A&A Growers and Kaaij UK), and will be managed on a day-to-day basis by Gert van Straalen. A completely equal ownership model, the greenhouse is testament to the strong partnership built between the four businesses in their time at



Kent Pink Plum tomatoes. Grown exclusively at Thanet Earth.



The TG1 shareholders. L to R: Chris Mack (Fresca Group) Wim Grootsholten (Rainbow Growers), Cor van der Kaaij (Red Star), Addy Breugem & Arjan de Gier (A&A Growers)



Thanet Earth and, of course, with Rabobank who have demonstrated their continuing confidence in the project with considerable investment capital.

A celebratory opening event brought together the grower partners, representatives from Rabobank, from Bom Greenhouses, from the local planning and government authorities and from the community. Local chef Jason Freedman prepared a mouthwatering lunch that showcased the versatility of the Thanet Earth crops.

The event was a chance for the partners to celebrate the success of the committed project team who realised the build, and to consider the next steps in the Thanet Earth story. Ian Craig, managing director of Thanet Earth Marketing and deputy chief executive of Fresca Group told the gathering that "Whilst the prevailing economic climate has made many companies reluctant to invest, the Thanet Earth proposition is clear and profitable. We have been much encouraged by the support of our retail customers and of the local community. Whilst we have no set dates yet around the construction of our planned three further greenhouses, we remain committed to the expansion of this site to reach its planned capacity."



Ian Craig, managing director of Thanet Earth Marketing Ltd

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For further information about the Thanet Earth site and background about the project partners, please see www.thanetearth.com

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