

# New Moves in Horticultural Machinery

At the December meeting of the West Midlands Fresh Produce Forum at Pershore College two representatives of machinery importing companies gave presentations on equipment available to salad and vegetable growers, from cultivation and weed control to planting and cutting-edge harvesting technology. Of course a lot of the equipment needs of conventional growers for cultivations, drilling, planting, harvesting etc. are similar to those of organic growers, but the withdrawal of much of their chemical armoury means that conventional growers are looking seriously at alternative means of weed control and this is driving innovation in machinery development.

## Salmac Ltd

Salmac specialises in the supply and support of vegetable, salad & fruit machinery for the grower, from primary cultivations through to harvest. Tom Jones (no, not that one)



*Ortomec 4m harvester*

explained that Salmac can supply almost any product from a wide range of manufacturers, both national and international and can work with growers to adapt to their specific requirements. Concentrating on new developments he started with the Italian Ortomec range of harvesters for baby-leaf salad production. They produce a range of trailed and self-propelled harvesters on wheels or tracks, incorporating oscillating band-saws and shaker-belts on some models to shake off soil from the crop. They also offer a mechanical cleaner which will follow the first cut of a leafy crop (e.g. rocket) with a lower cut and a vacuum to suck up any trash remaining, thus reducing possibility of any disease carry-over and allowing a clean second harvest. A tractor-towed spreader wagon, which will thinly spread material on the surface of the bed, is available. It is mainly used for lamb's lettuce production on the continent, but they have sold one to an organic grower for spreading a bed width of chicken manure pellets for drilling into. Some adjustments to the gearbox were needed as it was initially spreading 80t/acre! Their range includes a 'multi-tractor' which



*Multi-tractor seed-drill combi*

is a self-propelled tractor unit equipped with hydrostatic 4-wheel drive, designed for use with the Multi-seeder (for drilling up to 31 rows of baby leaf), but can also be used for other applications, although not for harvesting. For weed control they sell the HOAF

gas weed burners (see OG8) and also a combined bed-former and burner for sterilising the top 2cm of the soil, which acts by removing the soil, heat-treating it and replacing it on the bed. They claim a 99% kill of weed seeds. The machine can work up to 300m of bed per hour, consuming 140kg of gas while it's at it. Whether your certification body would allow its use is another matter.



*Hoaf twin sprite*

[www.salmactld.co.uk](http://www.salmactld.co.uk)

## Deptford Marketing Ltd

The array of machinery offered by Deptford is broadly complimentary to that of Salmac, with a range of inter-row weed equipment, block transplanters, bed-formers and harvesting equipment (mainly for field



*Steketee 3-bed weeder*

vegetables). New developments include camera-guided hoes. Steketee have developed 3-bed camera-guided weeders that operate with an independent camera on each bed, and even sat nav so that the tractor operator can read a paper - thus reducing stress! They are in the process of developing intra-row weeders but Geoff Wright admitted that Steketee were playing catch-up with Garford. They can operate with a range of different units or combinations, such as A-blades, rotary harrows, S-tines, finger-weeders etc. to suit the crop. Deptford also offer the Regero block and module planters including a pneumatic planter, which operates with a compressor on the front of the tractor. Their latest version is capable of planting 6500 plants per row per hour. These machines have space to stack several pallets of plants, which means that they need a large headland for turning. Fedele



*Fedele planter*

planters from Italy include a machine that will lay and plant through plastic (including biodegradable) mulches, and this is proving popular with organic growers. A range of Simon machines are available including the CultiGrille, a

stone-burying machine for bed-making, which creates good soil tilth for baby leaf and is being used effectively in quite difficult conditions in Ireland. The French firm CM have built machines for laying plastic film over cloches - semi-automatic machines are fed with pre-formed wires while automatic machines will bend straight metal into hoops. These are mainly used for growing lamb's lettuce. Another machine will retrieve the plastic and shake the soil off for recycling. A full range of mini-veg packers are sold, including one with a 14' side arm for 'smaller growers'.

[www.deptfordmarketing.com](http://www.deptfordmarketing.com)

*Phil Sumption*



*The Simon cultigrille*

Photos: Deptford Marketing Ltd

Photos Salmac Ltd