

## Discovery Fellowship student winner announced

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012

A pressure on every fresh produce supplier is to offer a constant programme of innovation and new product development (NPD). For Thanet Earth, this element is hugely important as the business aims to help retailers give their customers a sweeter tomato or a fruit that stays fresher for longer to help provide that all-important point of difference.

Working in conjunction with Hadlow College, nr Tonbridge in Kent, Thanet Earth has found a way to achieve some of these goals whilst offering a horticulture student an opportunity that could kick-start their career in commercial growing.

Robert James, Technical Manager at Thanet Earth Marketing explains the logic. "NPD can be pretty complicated, particularly on tomatoes. Meticulous record-keeping, dedicated research space and a good understanding of the technical set-up of a commercial greenhouse are essential elements of such a programme. Whilst the Thanet Earth greenhouses all run variety trials in dedicated research rows, we've identified NPD as a clear opportunity for Thanet Earth to help provide a student with new skills and genuine commercial experience – something that's very hard to provide in a college setting."

Thanet Earth is offering a Hadlow horticulture student a 'Thanet Earth Discovery Fellowship'. This will see the student paid to spend 9 months working from a dedicated greenhouse at Hadlow, equipped with a growing system comparable to a commercial greenhouse, on behalf of Thanet Earth.

The Hadlow College three year degree course in commercial horticulture is going from strength to strength. A review of content and structure has resulted in a huge success for the college as the number of students enrolling on the course has soared. With so many talented young people now receiving such expert training from a prestigious institution, the future is indeed looking much brighter for UK horticulture.

A shortlist of three students were invited to visit Thanet Earth, to meet the growers, to give a presentation and to demonstrate their enthusiasm at interview. This thorough selection process was valuable experience in itself, but resulted in Thanet Earth awarding the Discovery Fellowship for 2012 to Tom Pilcher, a year 2 BSc student.

A celebratory lunch event was hosted by Hadlow College last week at which Tom was awarded with a Fellowship trophy and during which speakers from Hadlow College, Thanet Earth and independent specialists discussed the rejuvenation in horticultural training and the



Tom Pilcher, the Thanet Earth Discovery Fellowship student for 2012.

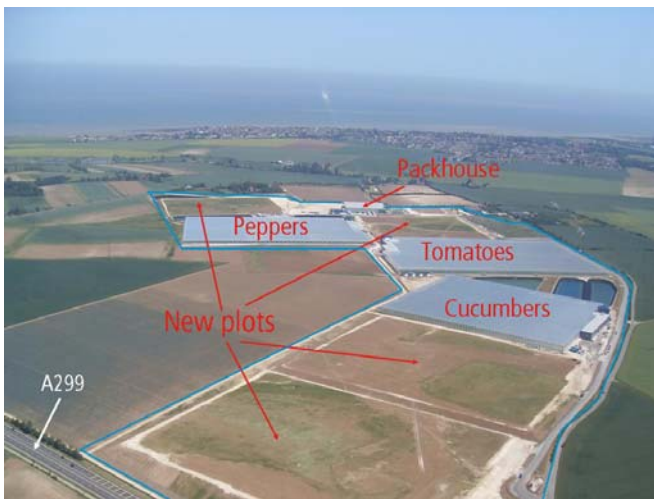
potential for the industry of initiatives such as this Fellowship. Tom delivered an eloquent acceptance speech, noting how “The Discovery Fellowship provides me with an excellent opportunity to enhance my future prospects in the industry”, demonstrating the value of commercial experience to today’s students.

Tom will spend time with the commercial growers at Kaaij Greenhouses UK, (tomato grower at Thanet Earth) and with the technical and commercial teams at Thanet Earth Marketing Ltd. He’ll be supported by training in the most effective use of the greenhouse technology, by mentoring, reviewing his trials work and ensuring he’s given the right expertise to make the most of the opportunity for his own professional development.

It’s hoped that the Discovery Fellowship will yield some very exciting new varieties for Thanet Earth to take forward into commercial greenhouse trials and ultimately onto retail shelves. Depending on the success of this first year’s award, there’s potential to roll this into an annual opportunity for a Hadlow horticulture student, offering promising candidates a rare opportunity to gain commercial experience as part of their studies.

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#### Information for editors:



Thanet Earth is a state-of-the-art greenhouse development in Kent. When completed the site will feature seven enormous greenhouses, producing tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. So far, three of the greenhouses have been constructed and are fully operational alongside an on-site packhouse. The crops are sold to the UK’s supermarkets.

Thanet Earth is a joint venture, owned jointly by the Fresca Group of companies and three specialist grower companies.

For information about the business, its background and operations, see [www.thanetearth.com](http://www.thanetearth.com)

#### Further information available from:

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Tom Pilcher with Robert James, technical manager at Thanet Earth Marketing Ltd



L to R: Sarah Morgan (faculty manager, Horticulture, Hadlow College), Alan Harvey (degree programme leader, Hadlow College), Tom Pilcher and Robert James