

## Discovery Fellowship student winner announced

7<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Throughout the summer months of 2012, the Thanet Earth Discovery Greenhouse at Hadlow College was buzzing with activity. Second year Commercial Horticulture degree student, Tom Pilcher, was in charge of more than 500 tomato plants in a dedicated greenhouse, conducting variety trials on behalf of protected salads specialist, Thanet Earth Marketing Ltd.

This paid fellowship position came to an end along with the tomato season, but such was the commercial benefit for Thanet Earth and the teaching and experiential benefit for Hadlow College that both parties have pledged to continue their support. The Discovery Fellowship will continue with a second year of variety trials in 2013.

At a very well-attended event at Hadlow College, Tom handed the reins over to this year's selected Horticulture student, Richard Killian.

Richard will spend time this month learning the detail of large-scale tomato growing and the specific method of speciality tomato production used by Gert van Straalen at Kaaij UK – the tomato growing partner at Thanet Earth. Once he's confident in the technology used, the irrigation requirements and the common threats to plants from pest and disease then he'll take delivery and control of the young plants at Hadlow College.

Thanet Earth Marketing needs to demonstrate an active programme of variety development for its retail customers. Each stocks a unique range to suit customer demand, and a great supplier is one that helps identify and develop the range. Thanet Earth Marketing works closely with seed companies and plant breeders to offer a trials environment for potential new opportunities.

Depending on the performance of these new varieties in the Discovery Greenhouse at Hadlow, selected plants will move on to a trial within a Thanet Earth greenhouse. From here they'll be finally assessed and offered to retailers before either moving into full commercial production or being consigned to the 'not this time' pile.

The Discovery Fellowship is providing a real solution to issues faced both by Thanet Earth and by Hadlow College. Riding on the wave of demand for UK-grown crops, and in the context of global concern over food security and the pressure of feeding a fast-increasing population, the horticulture industry in the UK has enormous potential to expand. As Robert James, technical manager



Robert James presents the Discovery Fellowship Award for 2013 to Richard Killian



2012 Discovery Fellow, Tom Pilcher, in the greenhouse at Hadlow College



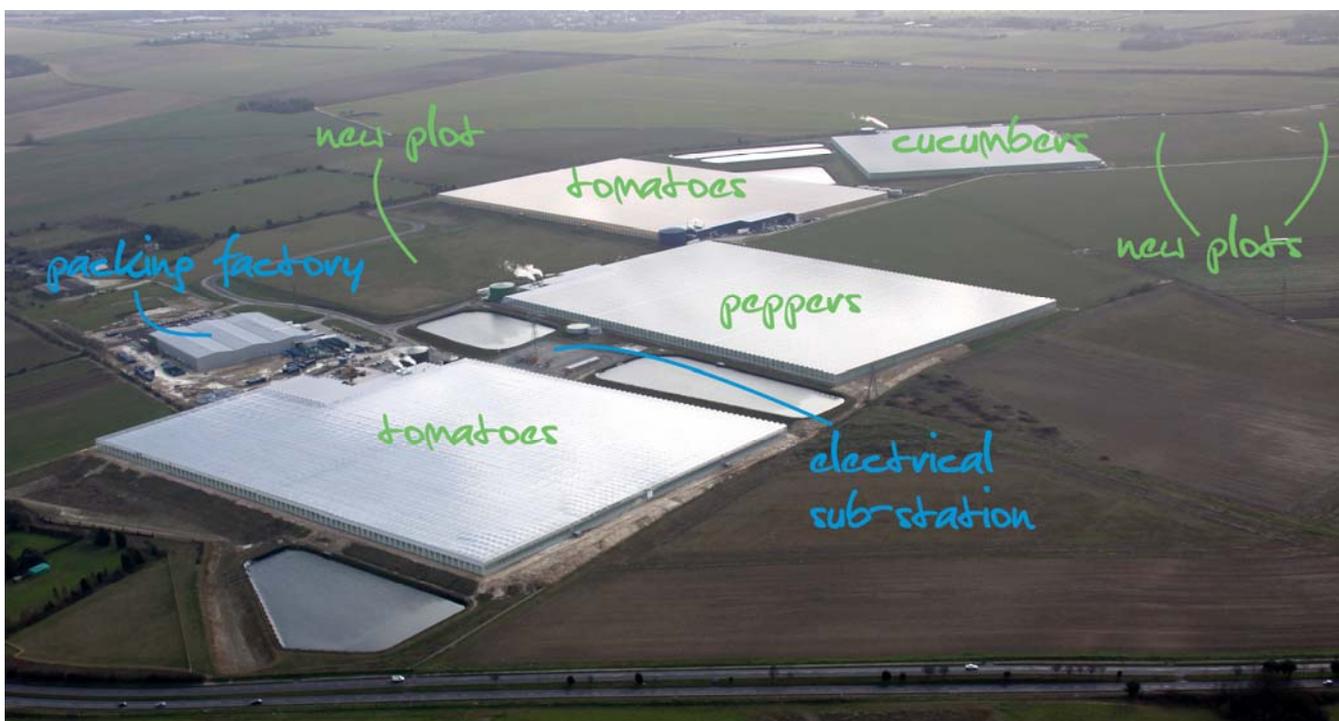
Every week through the summer the greenhouse provides a technicolour mix of trial tomato varieties.

at Thanet Earth explains: "We need bright young people to see Horticulture as a career of choice, and we need to provide education and training that's relevant. Our agricultural and horticultural colleges must produce graduates who are ready to jump into a career already equipped with the right knowledge for the job."

This partnership provides unparalleled access for students to commercial growing systems and training, but provides a supporting framework through the Hadlow College lecturers and facilities. It's a 'safe' learning environment, working to real issues and challenges. Richard Killian is very much looking forward to this new opportunity: "Getting selected for this Fellowship is a unique opportunity for me. I've got a complicated, fast-moving schedule over the next couple of months, and loads to learn. I'm looking forward to getting the Discovery Greenhouse in production again, and to working alongside the people at Thanet Earth and their retail customers."

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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, four of the greenhouses have been constructed and are fully operational alongside an on-site packhouse. The crops are sold to the UK's supermarkets, with speciality tomato production taking place all year round.

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

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

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