

—Food waste

Closing THE LOOP

Fred Searle speaks to managing director of VeriGreen, Martin Heathcote, about how his business is putting fresh produce waste to good use by creating energy, heat and biofertiliser

🐦 @fredfruitnet

How does VeriGreen make the most of fruit and veg producers' food waste?

At VeriGreen, we maximise the potential of our clients' food waste, helping them minimise their business's environmental impact. We do this by picking up their produce and food waste directly from their premises, using our dedicated fleet, and transporting it to a local anaerobic digestion (AD) plant, minimising our carbon footprint and maximising customers' environmental and ecological benefits locally.

To what extent have you been able to create a closed-loop recycling process?

Managing food waste through AD helps us progress towards a circular economy by creating energy, heat and biofertiliser. The biofertiliser is used by farmers to add nutrients back to the soil and grow more food, reducing reliance on high carbon footprint manufactured fertilisers.

VeriGreen's closed-loop solution means we can service every stage of the process. We first collect produce and food waste from

RIGHT—Martin Heathcote wants to help companies reach zero-to-landfill status

a variety of sectors including growers, farms, packing plants, food production plants, hospitality, logistics companies, supermarkets, local authorities, waste collectors and ports.

Then we transport food waste to AD facilities. This generates green energy to power local homes and allows us to produce quality biofertiliser that is supplied to farms for use as a renewable fertiliser. No fossil fuel is used in the production of the digestate.

What are the main advantages of anaerobic digestion for producers and the environment?

Anaerobic digestion enables producers to achieve zero to landfill status for their organic waste. At an AD plant, the 'green' gas generated is used to make electricity, or is injected into the gas grid network or stored for use as bottle or transport fuel. The green energy produced helps reduce the UK's reliance on imported gas and electricity, and reduces the producers' carbon footprint.



How much progress are we seeing from UK fresh produce companies in becoming zero to landfill?

Zero to landfill is a challenge for many businesses including fresh produce companies. At the same time, organic waste is only one of the waste streams generated. VeriGreen, part of Heathcote Holdings, is one of a group of complementary businesses which embrace the circular economy and transform zero to landfill from a dream to a reality.

This is done by processing organic waste at AD plants or compost sites and directly recycling other streams such as wood, cardboard and plastics. Those streams that cannot be recycled are incinerated to generate energy from waste.

What new technologies are you considering investing in?

Our focus is on understanding our customers problems and finding solutions to them. An example of this would be recycling coir growing medium, a project currently in the pipeline.

We are also looking at the feasibility of running vehicles on the gas generated by AD plants, and have recently invested in specialist spreading equipment for the efficient and accurate application of biofertiliser. This is essential to ensure the next generation of crops receives the optimum level of nutrition, and to ensure the biofertiliser is applied to the soil in a cost-effective and compliant manner. **FPJ**