

# SKILLED OPERATORS ARE A MUST

*Employing experienced, full-time operators is one of the key ingredients of a contract fertiliser and biosolids supply-and-spread operation serving farms in Lincolnshire and the East Midlands*

**J**SE-Systems is a full-service business, providing soil sampling and analysis, advice on soil and plant nutrition, and supplying bulk soil nutrition materials. Fast and accurate application of fertiliser, lime, gypsum, manure and biosolids completes the suite of services available.

"Having FACTS qualified advisers and employing full-time spreader operators is imperative for consistency of service and to meet the individual needs and preferences of our customers," says Nik Johnson, who runs the business from its Ancaster farm base near Grantham. "Our spreader operators are the interface between the business and the customer, so their knowledge of our customers' farms – knowing where to tip, which roads to use and not to use, and so on – is essential for a positive long-term relationship."

The current business has been built

*The CVT transmission, self-levelling suspension at the front as well as the rear, and the new cab design have together created a more productive Fastrac, says Nik Johnson of JSE-Systems.*

on the foundations of a contract service started in the 1970s by Nik's father Les using a small crawler tractor for low ground pressure spraying. Acquiring the agency for Fibrophos P and K fertilisers and then an Anglian Water biosolids contract helped the business expand its spreading services.

Today, a fleet of Terra Gator applicators handle biosolids, a pair of Bunning Lowlander spreaders – one operated by a Fastrac 8310 bought in 2016 – applies farmyard manure, and half a dozen Fastrac 3230 Xtra and 4220 high-speed tractors haul trailed Bredal K105 fertiliser spreaders.

The annual workload typically amounts to around 100,000 acres of lime and fertiliser spreading, and 250,000 tonnes of biosolids, yard manure and chicken litter.

"Our business focuses on putting back the nutrients that farmers' crops

take out in a way that maintains the balance needed for all nutrients to be effective in contributing to good crop yield," says Nik Johnson. "It is well documented that nitrogen is the key driver of outright yield for most crops but the supporting nutrients, in particular phosphate, potash, sulphur and magnesium, are equally important in providing a fertile soil and maximum response from nitrogen."

It follows, then that in a year of high yields, demand for replacement nutrients is high and less when yields are not so good. But the customer base is steadily increasing as growers appreciate the firm's service quality and competitive pricing, as well as the value of using a professional spreading operation at a busy time of year.

"Our workload peaks at a time when farmers are frantic with harvest and preparations for the next crop,



*Four-wheel steering is standard on the Fastrac 4220.*

so we need to fit in with high capacity equipment post-harvest and before cultivations get underway," Nik points out. "A Fastrac and spreader combination is ideal in that respect, and also for providing the comfort and long-term well-being that our operators deserve.

"We've used Fastracs since the year dot, running pretty much every model that JCB has produced over the past 25 years," he adds. "As an operator and owner, I've been impressed with JCB's development process because every new model has been a progressive improvement on the previous one.

"But it was a big surprise, a real shock, to discover just how good the new Fastrac 4000 is because the tractor's been transformed by the combination of all-round self-levelling suspension, the CVT transmission and the new cab – modern technology that all works in a practical way."

JSE-Systems runs a pair of Fastrac 4220s alongside three Fastrac 3230 Xtra tractors pulling 10.5 tonne capacity spreaders. Apart from a crimped wire and a leaky oil tank cap, the new 4220s have not missed a beat over more than 1000 hours each of field work and road travel.

"The great thing about any Fastrac is that you can do 12 hours in one and get up the next day feeling refreshed," says Nik Johnson. "The 3230 Xtra is a good tractor and, as long as you can stay in a range, the SmoothShift powershift transmission works well.

"But the operators absolutely love the 4220s with the CVT 'box because you always have the perfect speed for any situation. The new cab is roomy, comfortable and very well built, and the new suspension takes ride comfort to another level."

Each of the company's operators works autonomously, towing a trailer with a JCB Loadall telehandler on board for filling in the field, and with a spreader towed behind. GPS visual guidance ensures good bout matching for the spinners, which are shielded by a flexible curtain to reduce dust when spreading ash-based fertilisers, gypsum and lime products at up to 15mph.

"That's our modification; it folds out to 12m and works well at getting the product on the ground rather than blowing away in a big dust cloud," says Nik Johnson. ■

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