

# Nursery automation is the name of the game for Javo

**I**N MAY this year Maurice van Berkel, the International Dealer Manager for Dutch nursery automation company Javo, was in New Zealand visiting Javo's New Zealand agents, Daltons, and some of their customers using Javo machines.

Daltons have been selling Javo's potting machines and other equipment since 2015 and now carry some of the range in stock along with spare parts and offer full local engineering support.

Javo, started back in 1948, is still a family owned and run company. It sells more than 500 automated nursery machines in 60 countries every year but mainly through Europe, Australia, NZ, China, and America.

Maurice has been with the company for more than 20 years, starting as a service mechanic, later moving into sales.

At the end of May Comm Hort spoke with Maurice about nursery automation in general and trends for the future.

"As what we call the 'outside sales manager' I get to go all over the world visiting our dealerships to find out what their needs are," Maurice said.

"For instance, in New Zealand there is a completely different need for automation than in say France or Italy or Holland."

*How is it different here?*

"There is different media, different pots, different ways of growing, different growing structures. The way the products are sold is different and therefore growers make different choices of using the different pot sizes."

Changes to potting media being used around the world is an area where Javo have lately been putting

a lot of research effort, said Maurice.

"What we are seeing here in New Zealand, and also in other parts of the world is a lot more wood fibre and bark included in substrates. The world is going to be peat-free in the substrates it uses in the future – in 2027 in the UK and 2030 in Europe – so we as a manufacturer have to be ready for that and ensure our machines can work with all different soil types.

"We also have to ensure our existing machines, which will be there for quite while, need to be



Maurice van Berkel

*Javo is now run by the third generation three sisters of the Van Nobelen family, Cindy (Marketing Manager), Patricia (Executive Assistant) and Chantal (Quality Manager) together with Koos de Vink (CEO) and Ber van Nobelen*



*The Javo factory produces automated nursery machinery for sale through more than 60 countries*

able to work with the newer substrates that will come through."

*What do you do to allow that to happen?*

"Quite often it is to do with changing the machine set up. The growers are not engineers, they are growers but quite often they will just change things and hope that it will work. When new or different substrates are being used we need to advise on how best to set up for them."

## Abrasive ingredients in substrates

Some machines in the Javo range for New Zealand and Australia have already had more stainless steel components included to better cope with the more abrasive nature of ingredients like pumice and bark being used in potting mixes here.

*How much of what you sell is standard machines straight off the factory floor as against product that is made especially for a particular customer?*

"We have a wide range of 'standard' products then a mixture of many options so you can customise that way. It's like when you buy a car, you can make many changes from the range of options they will offer, a different radio or different seats for example.

"There are some items with Javo, however, that we do make specially and in fact the development of all of our products would have originally come from the ideas of our customers or the need to produce something to solve a particular problem."

Maurice said while increasing

productivity is the ultimate aim of automation, keeping staff has also become a big motivator for nurseries around the world.

"We are selling mostly in the countries where labour costs are high but we are also getting more and more to see employers motivated to install automation not just because labour is expensive but it is also hard to get and they want to keep their good people."

*When a grower wants to automate, do you have a standard plan and say, install this first, then add this, then add this?*

"No, there is too much variation, the soil, the pots, the plants, the way the nursery is set up, where everything is in relation to everything else. So there is no set progression."

*So do you look at how a nursery is operating and say, these are your weak points . . . ?*

"We need to get as much information as possible about how the nursery is set up, layout, the pot sizes they are using the production capacity they want, is the nursery on level ground, what is the flow of the soil and the plants coming in and the plants going out. Then we can, through our dealers, give the right advice."

Maurice stressed that installing a potting machine won't necessarily make a nursery suddenly efficient. "You need to have a total flow, flow-in of plants and soil, and flow out of plants. Javo has a lot of systems and functionality for after the plants have been potted. More nurseries are now doing this correctly but for many others this is where the catch-up needs to be."