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DRIVING THE **VITICULTURE** SECTOR FORWARDS

From the smallest vineyard tractor to the largest combine harvester, when it comes to machinery, Sam Barnes has worked with it all. In 2018, after noticing an increasing demand from UK vineyards for certain types of contractor work, Sam set up his own company, S J Barnes Limited, offering specialist mechanical vineyard management services to grape growers across the South East.

Helping vineyard owners to achieve the best potential from their crop, in the most cost effective and time efficient way, SJ Barnes' services cover the whole growing season, from planting and alleyway establishment, to mechanical weeding, spraying, canopy management and even mechanical harvesting. Whether small, or large, vineyards can take advantage of hiring Sam and his equipment not only to avoid capital costs on seasonal pieces of equipment but for ease and peace of mind that the job is being done to a high standard.

Exhibiting at Farm Expo 2020, Sam will be showcasing his mechanical harvester which made its thrilling debut in time for harvest 2019. After three years' extensive research and a self-funded study tour to New Zealand, Sam invested in a state-of-the-art Pellenc 890 and is now the first UK-based contractor to offer mechanical grape harvesting.

Having successfully trialed the machine at Bolney Wine Estate's Pookchurch vineyard, there was a surge in demand for the harvester as growers looked to bring in fruit at the optimum time and condition, while reducing costly overheads linked to hand picking labour.

Farmers considering planting vines, or those looking to expand plantings, will also be able to discuss vineyard establishment with Sam, who is also an agent for France's largest vine nursery, Les Pépinières du Comtat and can supply a range of French and German varieties to vineyards in Great Britain.



CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY

As well as being able to see the latest farming equipment on show, visitors to Farm Expo on 4 March will also be able to network with others in the industry.

To give people an opportunity to forge real, meaningful business to business relationships, the organisers of Farm Expo, the Kent County Agricultural Society, will be launching a special networking breakfast called Agri Connect at the show.

Taking place at 8:30am at the Kent Showground, Detling, the Agri Connect networking breakfast will be open to everyone directly involved in, or supplying to, the farming industry. Refreshments will be sourced locally, with the format set to be light-hearted and informal with an aim simply to get people talking.

"With busy shows like Farm Expo, because there is such a steady stream of visitors to talk to, the exhibitors rarely get chance to catch up with each other," said Becky Parrock, PR and seminar coordinator, "but the agricultural world is tight-knit and quite often stand holders want to be able to discuss business to business opportunities with each other too. The Agri Connect breakfast will ensure that everyone gets the chance to, well, connect."

The event, which has been inspired by other successful networking lunches held recently by the agricultural society, will be free for Kent County Agricultural Society members to attend. There will be a £10 per head charge for non-members, with any profits made being returned to the charitable society to help fund its vital scholarship programme, Kent Rural Scholars, where three students a year are awarded a grant to support each year of their agricultural or land based studies at university.

"The society is in an ideal position to become a gateway between the local agricultural and business communities and so we have been hosting networking events like this throughout the year," said Becky. "It is encouraging to see so many businesses interested in helping those in the agricultural sector and we saw Farm Expo as a prime opportunity to bring everyone together."