

Briefly

◆ Bargain acquisition

Off-licence and convenience store group Conviviality has bought 127 Central Convenience stores in a £25m deal. The purchase of stores includes 109 owned and 18 franchisee operated stores located in the south and south west of England.

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Bringing a hands-on, agricultural approach to the viticulture industry

Growing up on Kent's oldest commercial vineyard in Biddenden, Sam Barnes has been immersed in viticulture his whole life. Having studied agriculture at Lackham College, Wiltshire, his early years were spent contracting for arable farms in the Cotswolds. Sam is now embarking on a new enterprise, S J Barnes Limited, offering specialist contracting services to vineyards in the South East of England.

While the area of vines continues to increase, Sam, who is the sales representative for machinery dealer N P Seymour, noticed a rise in demand for specialist vineyard contractors.

"There are good contractors in the industry but not nearly enough," said Sam Barnes. "I will be offering advice but will also be able to look after the practical side and offer working solutions."

Operating from the family's vineyard, Biddenden Vineyards, S J Barnes will be developing a fleet of specialist equipment, including a Fendt Vario 210V, a vine trimmer, under vine weeding machinery and a canopy sprayer, to benefit the viticultural community through practical, advice-led work.

"It's about bringing a hands-on, agricultural approach to the industry," said Sam. "My time working for arable contractors taught me about the finer points of a job and with experience of machinery I can take away the stress of

using unfamiliar equipment and doing jobs not part of the day-to-day norm for the majority of vineyard owners."

As well as investing in machinery, Sam will also be developing a bespoke combination drill to help vineyards establish cover crops over the winter months.

"Arable farmers have been using cover crops to lock in nitrogen for years. By building my own drill, I am hoping to offer a unique service to help vineyards take advantage of the benefits cover crops can bring," said Sam.

Focusing on machinery based work, from canopy spraying, to herbicide management, establishing and managing grass alleyways, and drilling of cover crops, Sam is hoping to help vineyards save time and labour costs. With services tailored to grower's specific requirements, S J Barnes will be dealing with a range of vineyard sizes from smaller hobby vineyards right up to large commercial grower-producers.

Alongside vineyard management services, S J Barnes is an agent for French nursery Les Pépinières du Comtat and will be supplying a range of French and German varieties.

"We have been dealing with Les Pépinières du Comtat, one of the biggest nurseries in France, as a family for a very long time," said Sam. "The agency is a development of our proven working relationship with them."

Sam is hoping to grow his business gradually and aims to keep it a personal service with his face always behind the business.

