

## PARTNER OF CHOICE FOR LARGE RETAILERS”

The Grower Files: Erdbeerhof Osterloh's Ulrich Osterloh about internationalisation

His passion is clear: he wants to be the best strawberry producer in Germany, or better still, in all of Europe. Ulrich Osterloh is not merely an expert in his field; he genuinely lives and breathes strawberries. After studying agriculture, he started growing strawberries in 1983 in Visbek, Germany; the place where multiple generations of his ancestors have lived for a thousand years. His business, Erdbeerhof Osterloh, grows strawberries on more than 250 ha of land. To keep the soil in top condition, Osterloh rotates his outdoor crop with marigold and grain. A noticeable development is the switch to covered crops: aside from a modest 0.5 ha greenhouse, production in modern plastic tunnels is set to expand to over 10 ha this year.

### Future Proof

“What I find most interesting about this trade is the combination of biology and technology. Of course, the ultimate goal remains the same: every year, we want to produce the best-looking and tastiest fruits for our customers to enjoy. The fact that we need to hire more than a thousand workers of various nationalities during peak season provides an extra challenge each year”, explains Osterloh. He adds that his ambition is to grow the business into a future-proof, diverse soft fruit producer that provides a foundation for his children, Alexander and Alicia, to build on.

As an entrepreneur, Osterloh is characterized by his drive for innovation; he is always on the lookout for the latest developments. For example, having seen a similar tool being used in the fruiting vegetable sector, he is investing in a remarkable rail system for the new polytunnels this year. Limiting labor costs is one of the aims behind each innovation, but the main goal is to improve the quality of the strawberries: according to Osterloh, quality and reliability are the two reasons why customers from across Europe prefer his product.

### International outlook

The business does not handle its own exports: sales are taken care of by its business partner, MAL, and coordinated by Wegener-Frucht, who supply a wide range of fruit directly to large end customers, including the big German retailers and discounters.

Even though Osterloh doesn't deal with exports directly, his outlook is noticeably international. “I always keep a close eye on the international markets: what are the latest marketing trends, and which opportunities do they offer?” Osterloh also regularly travels to strawberry-producing regions abroad to

expand his cultivation expertise even further, but he is yet to be convinced of the need for his own foreign growing location. “We don’t have any concrete plans to branch out abroad at the moment. Our current location provides sufficient space and facilities to expand further, and to specialize to a greater extent.” And that, in a nutshell, is his main message to other growers: have the courage to innovate and invest in the future.



#### > Erdbeerhof Osterloh

With crops covering more than 250 ha, [Erdbeerhof Osterloh](#) is amongst the largest strawberry growers in Europe. Quality and reliability are the main principles that drive Ulrich Osterloh’s business, and those are the reasons he is making the switch from outdoor crops to high-quality production in tunnels. Even though he has been in the strawberry business for almost 35 years, Osterloh has described this switch as an exciting and challenging project for his business, which is situated in Visbek, Germany (between Osnabrück and Bremen). “This switch will take us one step further into the future, and provides a foundation for my children, Alicia and Alexander, to build on.”

#### > Osterloh opts for Priva

Erdbeerhof Osterloh is in the middle of a transition process from outdoor crops to covered crops in greenhouses, but mainly in modern tunnels. To help realize this process, Ulrich Osterloh, the innovative, driven entrepreneur behind the business, has enlisted Jan Robben, the well-known Dutch strawberry grower, as well as Priva. To automate water dosage and fertilization, Priva has supplied Osterloh with a [Connex process computer](#).

#### > The Grower Files

In late 2015, Priva launched a video section under the intriguing title ‘The Grower Files’, in which notable national and international growers outline their vision of topical issues in the (greenhouse) horticulture industry. In these video messages ‘by growers for growers’, the entrepreneurs will also give an interesting insight into their business philosophy. Following in the footsteps of [tomato grower Frank van Kleef](#), [gerbera grower Marius Mans](#) and [potted plant specialist Frans Bunnik](#), the next installment features German strawberry giant Ulrich Osterloh.

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