



“WHATEVER CAN BE AUTOMATED, WE WILL AUTOMATE”

The Grower Files > Ulrich Osterloh of Erdbeerhof Osterloh on climate management

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. His business, Erdbeerhof Osterloh, grows strawberries on more than 250 ha of land. The large number of new polytunnels is striking, a sign of the transition to covered crops and an example of the innovative character of the entrepreneur from Visbek. Osterloh travels around the world to expand his knowledge and search for new technical cultivation possibilities, because given the size of his farm every step in the area of automation yields a significant profit.

‘Green fingers’

With the impressive transition from outdoor strawberries to crops in polytunnels, the possibilities for climate control are increasing for [Erdbeerhof Osterloh](#). “A climate computer is indispensable today,” he says. “But,” he adds immediately, “green fingers are still very important.” He cannot go a day without his process computer, [the Priva Connex](#), but here too his knowledge and experience are essential. Osterloh derives that intuition and deft touch from the Netherlands. The well-known Dutch strawberry grower, Jan Robben, spends several months on the German strawberry farm during the season.

This external knowledge is used, among other things, in the fight against diseases and pests. As little as possible and as early as possible, that is Osterloh’s philosophy when it comes to using crop protection agents in the polytunnels. “Of course, we use bumblebees and we are working more and more with natural pesticides.” There are many other challenges with outdoor cultivation, especially soil diseases. At present, they are controlled by means of crop rotation, with crops such as African marigolds (*Tagetes*), but Osterloh has plans to fumigate the soil on a large scale. “I have seen good results with that. We are currently looking at how best to organize it. In comparison with crop rotation, it will save on costs.”

Operational safety

Increasing operational safety is the leitmotif in Ulrich Osterloh’s vision: tunnel cultivation, his own planting material and further automation for continuity and quality, but also for extending the marketing season. “To be in the shops earlier and for longer, that’s our goal. Of course, that needs to be carefully considered and carried out in consultation with our sales partners. A lot is possible thanks to the opportunities for climate control. But if we introduce too many strawberries onto the market at the start of the season, in the period when southern Germany is also in full production, that will have a detrimental effect on pricing.”

Constantly innovative, always looking for new ideas, but taking every step in a carefully considered manner; that sums up Ulrich Osterloh’s business philosophy in a few words. “With a partner like Priva, we can take important steps in [climate control](#), water dosage, fertilization and irrigation. Whatever can

be automated, we will automate, but always based on the core concept of never making any concessions in terms of quality or continuity.”



> 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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