

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PRECISION TECHNIQUES FOR VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

*The term precision farming means different things to different people, but to many agronomists precision simply means using technology. Given the value and attention to detail inherent in vegetable production, it is no wonder that the sector was an early adopter of some techniques, such as RTK guidance systems for bed forming, and is now looking at how to develop precision farming technology further, writes **Richard Crowhurst**.*

"Nearly all large scale vegetable growers in the UK now use precision farming technology," says Andrew Williams, sales manager at AS Communications. "The uptake of precision farming among vegetable growers is generally high as growers realise the cost-saving benefits that technology can bring to their operations.

RTK control

Most growers use GPS guidance with an auto-steer system on their tractors and harvesters, often with RTK (real time kinematic) correction to give a pass-to-pass accuracy of just 2.5 cm. This helps reduce inputs and help maximize cropping areas, particularly where suitable growing land may be in short supply."

"Machine control is the most obvious technique for vegetable growers," agrees Jim Wilson of Soil Essentials. "Everyone has

been using RTK to put in beds for a while now and that's had a huge effect. The next step on is to add guidance for root vegetable machinery. However this is not as simple as having automatic steering on the tractor: we are steering the ridger, the bed former, the destoner, the planter and the mechanical weeder separately as well. This has been one of the big advances over the last 2-3 years and we've seen a big uptake of these systems."

"Our customers are also starting to use implement steering technology to help keep planters online during operations," agrees Andrew. "Growers are also using controlled traffic farming techniques to help minimize soil compaction, as well as techniques like yield monitoring and NDVI mapping to monitor crop performance and soil variation. Information gained from such crop monitoring is then often used to create



Jim Wilson of Soil Essentials.

