

BF Digger adds new JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader to its fleet

It's quite common for agricultural tractor salesmen to befriend their farming customers as this is how long-lasting business relationships are built. Down in the picturesque Cape Winelands between Worcester and Rawsonville, a former salesman and a farmer set a new benchmark when they became business partners as well.

Natie Ferreira studied civil engineering before allowing his love of all things mechanical to steer him into designing irrigation systems and later selling agricultural tractors. This is how he met Marius Brink, a grape farmer from Rawsonville.

"We met in 2004 and became firm friends, and when an opportunity to acquire three JCB Backhoe Loaders beckoned in 2016 we started a business together, merely as a sideline, and called it BF Digger Hire," Natie says. "This was derived from our surnames of Brink and Ferreira."

Through their knowledge of the area and its people, mainly farmers, their business grew at such a rapid rate that Natie resigned from the tractor dealership where he had worked to concentrate on running the business. Although a partner, Marius remains in the background.

Since acquiring the initial three JCB Backhoe Loaders, the company's fleet of yellow machines has grown steadily to now consist of seven JCB 3DX and 3CX Backhoe Loaders, eight excavators of which four are JCB Excavators in the 5,6-ton, 14-ton and 20-ton classes along with compaction equipment and trucks. A JCB 432ZX Wheel Loader forms part of a three-machine loader fleet.

"We can confidently say that the split of our customer base is 60% agriculture and 40% construction, and the former is really quite challenging at times," he adds. "We hire out mainly Backhoe Loaders and Excavators to the farmers for the following reasons."

Natie states that while grape farming may seem to the uninitiated to be a gentle pursuit, getting rid of old or diseased vines is heavy work, which always requires an excavator.



Bell Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson, with Natie Ferreira of BF Digger Hire while a JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader loads a truck in the background.

The mass of the machine is determined by the terrain as many vineyards are situated in rocky areas where the ideal growth conditions are created by the soil below the surface rocks. Removing diseased vines means that the entire root system and substantial quantities of soil, in which elements of the disease may remain, need to be removed as well.

"Our JCB JS140 14-ton Excavator is ideal for this type of work as its power and bucket size all combine to remove the whole vine as well as associated infrastructure like drip and micro irrigation pipes," Natie says. "The same applies to fruit orchards where older fruit trees and their irrigation systems are removed."

This same machine is also used for digging trenches in which new irrigation pipes are laid, cleaning rivers and streams of alien vegetation, reshaping the bottom and dredging dams.

"We attach an implement of our own design that creates holes for new support posts for the vines and this fits onto the boom of the JCB JS140 Excavator," Natie continues. "Other uses include de-bushing for new plantings and tilling the soil before the farmer applies fertiliser or lime."

BF Digger Hire has a policy of replacing older equipment at around 6 000 hours when cashflow allows this. Natie explains that for work in agricultural settings, machine utilisation is higher than that in construction as a farmer aims to get the maximum usage out of the hired equipment while it is on the farm. Annual usage in agriculture may therefore average 1 800 to 2 000 hours to a machine's life.

When the company recently decided to replace an older Backhoe Loader with a new one, the partners' first stop was at Bell Equipment, now the South African distributor for JCB equipment. "I called Fiona Johnson, whom I have known since my days selling agricultural tractors when I'd refer farmers looking for Backhoe Loaders to her," Natie explains. "True to form, Fiona offered us a new JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader with a front mechanical quick-hitch at an irresistible rate through JCB Finance and ABSA Bank, and as we had always bought our JCB equipment in this manner, this deal was definitely better than normal."

The mechanical quick-hitch at the front of the machine allows for a JCB-made grapple to be attached to load excavated vines and fruit trees onto trailers, making for a tidy workplace.

"We and our clients have always enjoyed working with JCB Backhoe Loaders as they are fairly simple yet robust machines and easy to maintain," Natie says. "Parts are readily available and with Bell Equipment now the South African distributor, we're confident that this will be the case for a long time to come."

Natie is full of praise for the JCB Livelink monitoring system which gives him total feedback on machine performance and usage. This is especially so when their JCB Backhoe Loaders are being driven between sites and not transported on a roll-back truck.

