

Composting is no longer backbreaking work with JCB Backhoe fleet

Imagine having to deliver one-thousand cubic metres of organic compost to a client's strawberry farm under contract using only a small utility truck with a capacity of one cubic metre, offloading by hand, and completing it successfully.

That's one of the challenges Michael du Plessis, founder and owner of Grow Green Organics in George had to overcome when starting out in his chosen field of making and selling organic compost. But let's allow Michael to take us back to where it all started: "I grew up on our family's dairy farm in the Western Cape and when the farm was sold, I went to work on dairy farms in the USA," he says. "I was also a long-distance truck driver for a while before returning to South Africa. An old friend then suggested I try my hand at making organic compost."

Starting his company, Grow Green Organics, in 2007 with manual labour and one delivery bakkie, Michael concentrated on producing organic compost for nurseries in and around George. That's when a local strawberry farm realised that this organic product

would add sweetness to its strawberries and Michael personally delivered 1 000 cubic metres in 1 000 individual deliveries, offloading with a shovel.

"By 2010 demand for our various gardening products had grown so much that we had to load and blend the base material mechanically. I took over the payments on a backhoe loader from the machine's owner who no longer needed the machine," Michael says. "This went against the grain of my business model as for the first time I had debt, which I hate having."

But before long Michael had bought another similar machine, two trucks, and even a mechanical rotary drum screen. The latter bought with borrowed money which made him work even harder to cancel out this new debt.



The Grow Green Organics father and sons team of MC (left), Michael and Timothy du Plessis (right) with their Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson (second from right).



“Hard work paid dividends as by now we started getting fixed supply contracts from nurseries and other large-scale users,” he recalls. “Our products were now also going out in bags which we were loading and sealing by hand. This was a slow and cumbersome process, but in time we imported a packaging machine from Ireland along with two mobile screens that improved the manufacturing speed.”

The year 2014 saw a paradigm shift in Grow Green Organics’ mechanisation drive as that was the year that Michael bought their first JCB 3DX Backhoe Loader. “I’d heard a lot said about JCB Backhoe Loaders and their rugged design and build. It was all true and we could now at last plan to run a new Backhoe Loader to 16 000 hours, which meant that we’d get a decent return on our investment through productivity as well as a positively good resale price.”

“Having started this business with almost nothing, I found it hard to part with older equipment but realised over time that it was for the best and getting especially older Backhoe Loaders replaced with newer JCB machines made the emotional wrench a bit easier.”

Michael, who was awarded the George Businessman of the Year for 2016/17, has two sons. His elder son, MC, joined the business in 2017 as the fleet manager, and his younger son, Timothy, joined in 2022. Today the company produces 25 different products that are distributed in bulk and in bags.

“We’ve found that the JCB Backhoe Loaders have really good resale value with whatever hours they’ve completed. This adds to the machine’s attraction and we’re sure its vast following worldwide,” MC says. “The

machine’s value is evident in the solid design and build and it delivers a solid return on one’s investment.”

“We run a total fleet of 60 vehicles and machines in our fleet that comprises 12 JCB 3CX Global Backhoe Loaders, a JCB VMT 260-120 Tandem Roller that has proved very popular in plant hire, and many trucks from tipplers to interlinked tautliners and trucks with ‘walking floor’ trailers,” MC adds. “But in our entire fleet, our 12 JCB 3CX Backhoe Loaders are undoubtedly the stars and when we don’t use them all, they are sought-after as plant hire machines.”

MC mentions that they keep one or two of the JCB 3CX Backhoe Loaders at the timber producers where they are used to load bark as an essential ingredient in their compost mixes. The machines’ versatility was also

shown when two new models, bought in December 2022 to replace older machines, demonstrated how effectively they can be used to blend the base material of the organic compost mix. Grow Green Organics has found that their JCB 3CX Global Backhoe Loaders return an average fuel consumption of nine litres an hour.

“We were pleased when Bell Equipment was appointed as the official distributor for JCB equipment and we’ve enjoyed dealing with the company’s supportive Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson,” MC says. “We can confidently say that we have one of the largest fleets of JCB 3CX Backhoe Loaders in the Southern Cape region and the reason for that is clear – we value high-quality machines as much as our client base values the high-quality products that these machines help us produce.”