

Where there's muck there

Michael Pedersen has built up a thriving business clearing poultry sheds – and he's just taken on another contract. **Alan Stennett** reports.

To many people, clearing poultry sheds is a thankless task – but ask Michael Pedersen to do it and he'll load up the poultry litter, take it away and find a good use for it.

His company, Pedersen Contracting Services – or PCS – specialises in clearing poultry sheds and removing the litter to a variety of end-users, including power stations, biodigesters and for soil improvement.

A major new contract signed on 1 August will add 30% to annual turnover, and the company is adding extra equipment and vehicles to handle the extra 120,000t it will involve.

Now the UK's biggest poultry house cleaners and hauliers, turnover is already growing at over 10% per year, and Michael expects to continue as specialists in the sector. He says: "It's what we know, and there doesn't seem any likelihood of it cutting back – the demand for poultry just keeps growing."

PCS grew out of Pedersen Pigs, set up in 1976 by Michael's father, Enjer, who came to the UK from Denmark in 1958 to run a trout farm in Lincolnshire. He diversified into pigs, but the business was damaged by an Aujeszky's Disease outbreak in the early 1980s. Enjer, with Michael and his other son, David, took on contract work for a large livestock operation in the area, eventually looking after 9,000 cattle and 17,000 sheep.

Almost by chance

They moved into clearing broiler houses almost by chance, when the litter began to be used as part of a stock-feed diet. That proved to be a short-lived experiment, but the company continued to clear sheds with the litter going onto the land.

After the death of Enjer in 1989, Michael and David began to specialise in cleaning out poultry units, and won a contract with Lincs Turkeys, then one of the largest UK operators. More work followed with other companies, and a new market opened in 1994 when a power station designed to burn poultry litter opened at Flixborough, in north Lincolnshire.

PCS then added transport to its service portfolio by buying their first two trucks to handle the new business, with more brought in when the operation moved to Thetford in Norfolk. As the demand grew, and supplying litter to bio-digesters was added to the list of potential users, the roster of equipment grew with it.

They currently operate 62 Bobcat skid-steer cleaners, twenty Merlo and Manitou handlers and loaders, ten tractor and trailer sets, seven plant lorries and 34 articulated trucks, including three modified to carry the smaller machines to a job as well as to haul litter.

Biggest end-user

"Bobcat and the handler companies tell us we're the biggest end-





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user of their kit – there may be larger hire fleets, but we are the biggest of the ones who actually sit on them and use them, and we do try to get in front of ourselves rather than have to run to catch up”.

PCS now collect litter from all the way down the east coast and as far west as Cheshire and south Wales. They deliver 1,000-1,200 tonnes every day to power stations at Thetford and Eye, supply ten anaerobic digestion plant, provide composters with 300 tonnes a week for mushroom compost, and move 12 loads a month of organic compost to a specialist grower.

“ We know exactly when the sheds are empty and the teams go straight in

These industrial operations are steadily growing, but agriculture is still a major user of poultry litter. Some material is too wet for the power station and it goes onto land along with the dry product that isn't needed for the other operations.

“Of the 120,000 tonnes a year from the new contract, only 30,000 will go to the power station, the rest goes onto the land, which is marketed to Anglia Farmers and the Woldmarsh Group as well as to local farmers.”

Michael is a firm believer in maintaining as much control as possible of both the collection and >>



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>> distribution of the material. “We pride ourselves that nobody rings us – they email the catching programme out to the farms and we get a copy of it, so we know exactly when the sheds are empty and the teams go straight in and run.”

PCS also do all the marketing to the various end users to be able to plan the distribution to suit the timing and availability of litter and equipment. “We’ve dealt with third parties, but it just doesn’t work – this way we are in control of our own destiny.”

Delivery trucks

Back loads are carried on the delivery trucks wherever possible, including recycled glass and silt-sand for glass makers.

David Pedersen died recently after retiring from the company three years ago, and management was restructured earlier this year when Michael became chairman. Chris Blades, who has been working with Michael since the cattle feeding days, and Nick Pedersen, Michael’s eldest son, are now joint



managing directors. David’s son, Chris Pedersen is IT and marketing coordinator.

The company has been based at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire since 1997. Following refurbishment of the Old Mill there, staff moved into new offices earlier this year. The 110 workers are all full-time, although retired staff are occasionally used when extra labour is needed.

Michael describes the business as ‘investors in people’ with all training done in house, and two apprenticeships in place. More land has recently been bought to allow for expansion, and there are plans to use the workshops to offer equipment and MOT testing alongside other facilities for haulage operators.

Michael admits there was an element of luck in getting into

the business in the first place, but adds it takes hard work by him and all his staff to keep it rolling.

“I was in the right place at the right time – you just get started and it’s suddenly this animal. We’re like a hamster on a wheel, because it’s that big that when it’s spinning you just can’t get off – you can’t slow it down. You just have to keep running.”

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