

# Innovation pays off

## Cost savings from innovation

### Van der Linden

In horticulture, the bar is constantly being raised: production has to go up, costs have to come down. Cucumber growers Henk and Floris van der Linden follow all technological developments closely to drive down the production cost per square metre ever further. Improved logistics and energy management have now delivered a cash profit.

“Our company Van der Linden Tuinbouw in Oud-Beijerland, grows cucumbers all year round. Initially, when it was founded in 1968 there were various crops, but in recent years we have definitively decided on cucumbers,” says Floris van der Linden.

“The primary objective is to remain disease-free, so people from outside the company are not admitted to the greenhouse unless they wear a special suit. Rising costs are an equally large threat. Labour is expensive. Heat is expensive.”

### A first in logistics

With its new internal transport system, Van der Linden achieved a world first. While this is an achievement in itself, the most interesting figure is the 25-30% labour saving that it brings to the company. Everything from harvesting to sorting now literally takes place on the production line, instead of the manual filling, stacking and carrying of crates. “After six months of testing, we were already convinced. After all, the workforce is the company’s biggest expense. Although with the price of natural gas rising, heat and CO<sub>2</sub> are almost overtaking labour,” says van der Linden. For this reason, the company also placed its energy management under the microscope.

“We called in an independent consulting firm to compare CHP solutions. It produced a list of suppliers that we invited to tender. After considering investment and maintenance costs, the return on investment, guarantees and references, two remained: the largest in the Netherlands and the oldest in the Netherlands,” says van der Linden.

“We opted for the oldest, Centrica Business Solutions (then ENER-G Nedalo). It has a lot of knowledge inhouse and is extremely focused on service. It immediately clicked. What difference does it make? Around 25-30% per year.”

### Growing upwards

Now that logistics and energy are once again mostly futureproof, Van der Linden is already focusing its attention on high-wire cultivation. This should increase the yield by at least 10%. “With a cucumber plant, we normally pinch out the growing tip at a height of 220cm and hang the side vines over iron wire. However, that produces a lot of pressure and overcrowding, and you end up ‘capping’ the yield. With high-wire cultivation, the tip isn’t taken off and the plant simply continues to grow. Technically we are ready, and as an entrepreneur we won’t miss out on this kind of opportunity.”

### Why Centrica Business Solutions?

Centrica Business Solutions is the oldest supplier of CHP units in the Netherlands and has the largest fleet of CHP units in Europe. A 1,560 kW MTU installation with flue gas cleaning was supplied to Van der Linden Tuinbouw and as a special feature, it was installed in a beautiful outdoor enclosure. Centrica Business Solutions is proving to be a true horticulture specialist. Customers that make intelligent choices in terms of energy will see their returns grow even faster than their crops.