

From Finland to the Garden of England

The managing director of Countrystyle Recycling tells **RWW** about the South-East-based resource management specialist's activities and its partnership with Cross Wrap, which supplies the business with automatic wrapping systems for its 120,000-tonne refuse-derived fuel operation

Managing a business is like being the head of a family. To guarantee a secure future, you have to nurture it, instil values for the communal good of everyone concerned and, as a proud parent, you are, of course, allowed to brag about it.

Chris Howard, MD of independent South-East-based resource management specialist Countrystyle Recycling, reels off a few facts and figures about the company he has led since 2012.

"We have a turnover of £45m and employ around 250 people. Our logistics division oversees waste collection and bulk haulage, which includes 200,000 tonnes of waste wood, about 45,000 tonnes of waste plasterboard, 150,000 tonnes of green and food waste as well as 120,000 tonnes of refuse-derived fuel (RDF)."

As an independent operator, Countrystyle supplies services to both large corporate customers such as DS Smith and Kimberly Clark, trade customers like Viridor, Veolia, Sita and FCC, as well as regional and local Kent-based businesses; a fact that Howard is obviously proud about.

"We have an integrated contracts division where we

provide total waste management to a lot of blue-chip organisations like Tate & Lyle and Smurfit Kappa," continues the MD. "Also in that division, we have a contract with the City of London for New Spitalfields Market, which is the single largest wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Europe."

Countrystyle is not as big as the major waste management businesses, but the MD points out: "We're big by independent and regional standards and our catchment area stretches from the Wash at King's Lynn to the Bristol Channel, encompassing all areas to the South-East."

Cross Wrap

And working with companies that share similar values is important to Howard. One of these is Cross Wrap, which supplies the business with automatic wrapping systems for its RDF operation.

"In fairness they are the market leader in their field," says the MD without hesitation. "As we started to develop the RDF part of the business, it was a logical step as they supply a proven product. Cross Wrap are very reliable; they believe in their product and they have an excellent after-sales culture. We

recognised that their values are very like ours and started working with them about three years ago. I would happily recommend Cross Wrap to anyone considering buying a system. I see them as one of our strategic partners for that element of our business."

The Finnish wrapping systems specialist is not the only European connection to Countrystyle. It exports its RDF and waste wood biomass to Sweden, Finland, Germany and Belgium.

"We understand the market and the process, which is very tightly regulated and, like the relationship with Cross Wrap, we try and establish productive long-term relationships with our end-users," says Howard.

"We supply some of the biggest German utility companies and they like our 'can do' attitude. When we say we're going to do something, we pull out all the stops to get it done."

The MD also has a 'no nonsense' attitude to Europe.

"We have to accept we're part of Europe. At the end of the day and given our proximity to Europe, it's easier for us to deal with someone in Europe than with other parts of the UK."

Countrystyle exports materials such as wood chip to Sweden, Finland and Germany by boat while supplying Belgian customers by road using Countrystyle's fleet of European walking floors.

"When you are moving 2,000 tonnes of biomass fuel at a time by vessel, it makes more sense from a carbon footprint perspective. Members of my commercial team charter the vessels, equating to some 50 ships a year," states the MD.

Organic growth

Looking to the future of Countrystyle, Howard predicts: "We'll continue to grow the business in all the key divisions and look to organic growth and make acquisitions if the right businesses come along at the right price. The only area where we're not currently involved is in the MRF treatment of dry recyclables such as cardboard, newspaper, cans and plastic bottles. So we are looking at investing in a materials recycling facility. As we look to extend our array of services, we also look to internalise our hazardous waste and WEEE collections."

Plenty to look forward to then? "I don't think I can retire just yet," quips the 41-year-old MD.

