

Autonomous agricultural machines

CLAAS cooperates with start-up AgXeed and acquires minority shareholding

Harsewinkel/Oirlo, 12 May 2021. CLAAS has entered into a cooperative venture with Dutch start-up AgXeed B.V. and acquired a minority shareholding in the company's international funding round as a mark of their commitment. The aim is to cooperate on the development and commercialisation of autonomous agricultural machines.

The farming industry must further increase productivity in the decades ahead to meet the needs of a growing global population. At the same time, the number of people employed in the industry, measured in terms of land area, continues to decline, while skilled labour is increasingly difficult to find in some regions and farmers still work longer hours than many other sectors. The agricultural machinery industry has come up with various solutions to address these challenges, ranging from operator assistance and machine optimisation systems to precision farming technologies, and even autonomous machines in different size and performance classes. For CLAAS, collaborating with and investing in AgXeed marks a logical step towards future-proof technologies.

Scalable technology and advanced peripherals

Netherlands-based AgXeed offers a smart, sustainable and fully autonomous system with scalable hardware, virtual planning tools and extensive data models, making it one of Europe's leading companies in this sector today. To this end, AgXeed will be bringing its autonomous AgBot to fields, pastures and specialty crops alongside a full suite of vehicle peripherals. The aim is for this autonomous field robot with diesel-electric drive, wheels or crawler tracks, up to 156 hp and standard three-point linkage to assist farmers with a wide range of tasks in future. "Our involvement provides CLAAS with access to innovative technologies in a familiar market segment and complements our own expertise in autonomy and robotics", explains Thomas Böck, CEO of the CLAAS Group. "In turn, AgXeed benefits from our extensive expertise and networks in many areas such as data transfer, interfaces and drivetrain solutions. It's a win-win situation in our view, and one reason why we decided to invest in this start-up company, as well as the fact that the targeted AgXeed technologies are in an advanced state of development. This solution offers farmers and contractors concrete economic added value, and what's more, it will soon be available."

Approaching market availability

"This type of cooperation reflects exactly what we stand for at AgXeed", adds Joris Hiddema co-founder of AgXeed B.V. "And this means setting up future-orientated alliances between innovative companies striving for sustainable agriculture where farmers are able to optimize productivity, while preserving the

soil and the environment. In CLAAS we have a partner on board that believes in and shares our ideas on the future of agriculture and will accelerate bringing our solutions to the fields of farmers”.

AgBot, together with the associated software solutions and platforms, is expected to be launched in 2022. The product and services offer customers sustainable added value. The AgBot takes care of the monotonous, tedious and in some cases dangerous tasks, leaving farmers more time to deal with the challenges they face today. In concrete terms, the ecosystem surrounding the central, web-based planning and analysis tool boosts efficiency through automated, optimised route planning and machine settings. Optional crawler tracks with belt widths from 300 to 910 mm, combined with a low maximum weight of 6.0 t (without ballast) makes the AgBot very soil-friendly. The vehicle also features an adjustable track width, load-sensing hydraulics and a linkage with a lift capacity of up to 8.0 t. An electric PTO, independent of the engine speed, and external high-voltage connections are optionally available. The electric equipment includes all the technology required for hazard and obstacle detection, in addition to an RTK steering system.

AgBots will be launched in various sizes and performance classes. Further solutions are currently under development.

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CLAAS (www.claas-group.com) is a family business founded in 1913 and is one of the world's leading manufacturers of agricultural machinery. The company, with Head Office in Harsewinkel, Westphalia, is the European market leader for combine harvesters. CLAAS is the global market leader for another large product group: self-propelled forage harvesters. CLAAS also holds the top spots in global agricultural technology with its tractors as well as its agricultural balers and grassland harvesting machines. Cutting-edge agricultural information technology also forms part of its product range. CLAAS employs more than 11,400 staff worldwide and in 2020 generated a turnover of 4.04 billion euros.