



tassie spreading contractor

ALL ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNITY

TIM MURFET NEVER IMAGINED HE WOULD HAVE A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE.

Born and bred in the city of Launceston, Tim's passion has always been driving trucks. When he and his father-in-law Dirk van Namen bought the trucking and fertiliser spreading business Altrac Spreading in 2012, Tim initially focused on the transport side of the business.

"Transport has been my life. I have driven trucks most of my life. I had a milk round, but I didn't have much of an agricultural background growing up in the city," Tim says.

"The previous owner of Altrac Spreading stayed on and helped as manager for about 18 months. Then they approached me and asked if I would learn the spreading side so I could take over running both parts of the business.

"There's so much to learn in agriculture, like how to relate to farmers and what their require-

ments are, but it's been a good challenge."

Growing up, Tim enjoyed going out into the bush, hunting kangaroos and camping, so he had an affinity with the outdoors, but he says farming "is a completely different kettle of fish to road transport".

Dirk's background was also in trucks. He had migrated to Australia from the Netherlands as a child and bought his first logging truck at age 19. He later ran refrigeration transport and logging

DIRK VAN NAMEN (LEFT) AND TIM MURFET OWN AND OPERATE ALTRAC SPREADING.

contracting companies.

He had been retired for six or seven years, when he decided to join forces with Tim to buy Altrac Spreading.

"He is in his 70s now and he just loves coming out and getting his overalls on and getting his hands dirty," Tim says.

WITH GPS AND TRACMAP, ALTRAC SPREADING CAN PROVIDE CLIENTS A SUMMARY OF HOW MUCH FERTILISER IT APPLIED AND WHERE.





◀ **NO JOB TOO SMALL**

Altrac Spreading operates in Tasmania's central midlands, which runs roughly between Launceston and Hobart.

The region was dominated by dry land agriculture, but the introduction of irrigation changed the dynamics, with many farmers adding crops to their dry stock farming, Tim says.

"A few years ago it was like brown concrete, but the water scheme came on board and you now have the irrigation pivots and the green landscape you see on Google Earth."

Traditional sheep and beef farming continues, but Altrac Spreading now serves farmers who grow a variety of crops and a few dairy farms.

Altrac Spreading services all sized properties through the flat, central parts of the midlands. Trucks travel as far north as Exeter, about 24 km north of Launceston, and down to Oatlands, which is between Launceston and Hobart.

THE TRUCKS ARE FITTED WITH CENTRAL TYRE INFLATION TO INCREASE TRACTION AND REDUCE COMPACTION.

"We have the pick of the area. We do everything from hobby farms to large properties. We don't ever want to say no to anyone. As long as we can fit through the gate, we will come and put on what you need done.

"It doesn't matter whether it is 5000 tonnes or 500 kg. You never know when that little hobby farmer may one day purchase one of the biggest properties in the region."

Altrac Spreading employs 8-10 local drivers, including six full timers, sub-contractors and casual staff depending on the season and workload. All staff are well trained.

"Local people have local knowledge. It is not just a matter of putting someone on. There is a quantity of training involved," Tim says.

"You can't just jump in a truck and go, there are so many things you need to enter into the computer. If you don't enter in the right information, you can run out of fertiliser. Literally what you put into the computer dictates what comes out of the truck.

"You are looking for something more when you are interviewing people to hire. You are looking at how they go about problem solving, how they react or respond,

whether they will have the business at heart, or they just want a job."

SERVICE AND MACHINERY

Tim says Altrac Spreading has the ability to spread a wide range of products and it uses the latest technology to get the best results. It mainly spreads fertiliser and lime, and does some dolomite, gypsum, compost and manure.

While Altrac Spreading does its best to meet customer's needs, it does not employ an agronomist. Tim recommends farmers seek expert advice if they are unsure about how much fertiliser they

↗ **ALTRAC SPREADING WORKS IN THE CENTRAL MIDLANDS OF TASMANIA, BETWEEN LAUNCESTON AND HOBART.**

might need, because you don't want to be putting on any more fertiliser or lime than you need to.

The Altrac Spreading team is busy in two main seasons. Autumn is the time of top dressing and Tim generally applies a slow-release super fertiliser and some lime.

In the spring, when the crops have gone in the ground, it is time to apply nitrogen and urea, before the crops are harvested in ▶



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THE ALTRAC SPREADING FLEET NOW INCLUDES FIVE SCANIA G440 AND P450 XT TRUCKS.

◀
 be the ideal vehicle to meet the demands of the busy spreading season.

“We will probably sell a couple of the MAN trucks this year because we don’t need that many and we will just keep two or three as spares. It is pretty important to have a spare truck ready to go in case something goes wrong.

“It is always nice to have a new truck, and these new Scania’s are comfortable to drive and have plenty of power. The drivers enjoy their job more and they do not feel sore at the end of a day’s work.”

LATEST TECHNOLOGY

The arrival of centre pivot irrigation has created new challenges for farmers in the Tasmanian central midlands region, with the centre pivots causing big ruts in the ground.

Tim says a pivot rut machine has recently been added to the fleet with the job of laying putty soil or gravel to fill in the holes left by the centre pivots.

Altrac Spreading’s trucks have been trialling a New Zealand product, the TracMap guidance system to improve efficiency of drivers on the farm to find the paddocks where they need to be.

“Having access to technology is important and some farmers are already asking for TracMap. The farmer can send their farm map to us, we can put it on our system, and then I can send it straight to the drivers.”

All the Scania trucks are equipped with TopCon X35 with auto steer, which is well worth having, Tim says.

“There is nothing cheap about it, but it is better for driver comfort. They can switch it on during a parallel run and then the automatic steering takes over. It is more accurate and the drivers are a lot happier, healthier and ready to go the next day.

“You still have to watch for ▶

◀
THE SCANIA TRUCKS’ BIG PAYLOADS ADD EFFICIENCY ON LARGER FARMS BY REDUCING THE TIME SPENT RELOADING.

◀ January and February. “The spring is a pretty important time of year for farmers. They have got to get the product on at the right time and if the forecast is for rain the phone doesn’t stop ringing. You have just got to try and make it work, and generally we get everything done.”

With the growth in cropping, Altrac Spreading has expanded the range of services it provides. It now sows crops and pasture and fills in pasture ruts.

Tim says service, professionalism and communication are critical for the survival of any business.

“If you don’t have the communication skills, and the customer doesn’t feel the job is going to

get done, you will get nowhere. But our customers are pretty understanding.”

It also helps if you have the right gear to get the job done. To get through the demands of a busy season, Altrac Spreading employs a fleet of Kenworth, MAN and Scania trucks and trailers. And recently it added a pivot rut machine.

When he first bought into Altrac Spreading, Tim ran two Kenworth trucks as his passion was more for the road transport side of the business, but he has since cut back to one.

The solitary Kenworth truck is used to supply the spreader trucks with fertiliser, lime and whatever materials they need to keep them going.

When he and Dirk bought the company it ran five four-wheel drive MAN trucks for spreading, which have done a great job over the years, Tim says.

In 2018 a new G440 six-wheel Scania truck was added to the fleet. It was a bit of a gamble as it was much bigger than the MAN trucks, but it soon paid off. The Scania proved to be more reliable and able to go places where the MAN trucks struggled.

The larger Scania’s greater capacity adds efficiency when working in larger farms where the stockpile can be 5-6 km from the paddocks where it will be spread.

There are now five Scania trucks in the fleet for spreading, and Tim says they are proving to

ALTRAC SPREADING’S DRIVERS WORK LONG HOURS DURING THE BUSY SPRING AND AUTUMN SEASONS

Come July and August, it is time to get the trucks into the shed and “go over them with a fine tooth comb” to get them ready for the busy spring season ahead, Tim Murfet says.

“We are pretty fussy with how we maintain our gear. We are always in the public eye, so our trucks always need to be well-maintained and cleaned up.” **AC**





THE SCANIA G440 HAS A 440 HP ENGINE AND CAN CARRY A PAYLOAD OF SEVEN TONNES.

↑ have it they will go somewhere else.

“It means that we are able to reassure the customer that they are well looked after.”

Central tyre inflation is also used on the spreaders to give extra tyre traction in the field. In turn, it reduces maintenance and downtime for the heavy machinery and it reduces the impact the trucks have in the paddock.

“It is like having massive shock absorbers and you don’t have to replace items on the truck as often.”

COMMUNITY AT HEART

Altrac Spreading is part of a close-knit community and is committed to supporting and playing its part in the local community. It sponsors Australia’s oldest agricultural show as well as local sports teams.

The Campbell Town Show has been running since 1838. It is the longest continually run show in the British Commonwealth and is Tasmania’s only traditional sheep show.

“Campbell Town is about 70 km south of Launceston. It is in the heart of the area where we work

and one of the oldest shows in Australia,” Tim says.

“We have so many clients involved in the show committee and in the show itself, so why not support the people who support our business.”

A presence at the show is also good for raising the public profile both of the business and the agricultural contracting industry, he adds.

“We take the trucks and trailers along to the show and the kids are in and out all day. They come and have a look and have a ball – it is what dreams are made off. You hear them saying, ‘I want to be a truck driver when I am older’.

“If you close the doors, then people don’t know anything about what we do and it’s just good to interact with people.”

(Normally held the end of May, the Campbell Town Show was postponed indefinitely this year due to the coronavirus.)

Supporting local sports teams is also about giving back to the community. Altrac Spreading sponsors a couple of local sporting clubs, including an under-14 girls’ football club.

“A lot of our clients’ kids play

↑ **ALTRAC SPREADING MAINLY APPLIES FERTILISER AND LIME, BUT ALSO DOLOMITE, GYPSUM, COMPOST, MANURE AND SEED.**

sport and it’s nice to support them. If people don’t donate or support these clubs, they just shut down,” Tim says.

Shopping locally and encouraging others to do the same is another way that Altrac Spreading gives back to those who support its business and the wider industry.

Tim says he feels very lucky to be involved in Tasmania’s agricultural industry.

“Over the past few years we have almost been the feed bowl for Australia. It is a good solid, secure industry that is only going to get bigger and bigger. We are in it for the long run, not for a quick hit. I can see myself doing this until I retire.” **AC**

↓ **TIM MURFET SAYS IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO BE INVOLVED IN TASMANIA’S AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY.**

◀ rocks, holes and whatever is in front of you and keep an eye on the computer, but with auto steer you can let go of the steering wheel because you know you will be going straight.”

TopCon’s technology gives variable rate control for spreading. This is becoming popular with farmers because it helps to ensure the correct amount of fertiliser is applied in the paddock.

With TopCon and TracMap, Altrac Spreading can plot the route for spreading in the paddock, precisely measure how much product to spread, and then, at the end of the job, provide the client with a record of how much was spread and where it was spread.

“If you want to stay in the game, you have just got to have the latest technology. If a customer asks, ‘Can you do variable rate spreading?’ or ‘Do you have TracMap?’ you need to have an answer, because if you don’t

