

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 3rd May 2010

Strawberries & Champagne in the John Joseph Mechi Garden at Chelsea

Strawberries and Champagne: the theme for the John Joseph Mechi garden at this year's Chelsea Flower Show will create huge interest from fruit loving visitors. A garden reflecting the times of this innovative Victorian farmer and a celebration of two special anniversaries for RABI and Tiptree jam.

John Joseph Mechi founded the farming charity: the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) 150 years ago. In June this year Wilkin & Sons Limited will celebrate 125 years of jam making at Tiptree, where fruit is still grown on the land once farmed by John Joseph Mechi. The creative skills of Ben Wincott, the designer from Writtle College, are reflected in his choice of the water feature, natural stone and the challenging planting.

"We hope that John Joseph Mechi, this Victorian entrepreneur and philanthropist who was so determined to pioneer new farming techniques, would have been pleased/proud to rest in this garden," said Ian Thurgood joint managing director of Wilkin & Sons Limited."

Ben's design illustrates the values of the Victorian plantsmen who were keen to introduce new methods of cultivation and new plants from abroad. A bubbling champagne style water feature, the introduction of copper to remind us that copper is still used in jam making pans and innovative ways of growing rhubarb will inspire visitors to replicate some of his methods in their own gardens.

After months of searching Ben has found a superb specimen tree for the garden, some beautiful Espalier pear trees, hundreds of strawberry plants grown for the show by Essex plant grower, Ken Muir, and rhubarb crowns that were taken from the fields where once Mechi farmed at Tiptree.

"We are delighted that Wilkin & Sons and Writtle College are supporting RABI through the creation of a garden dedicated to our founder. It will be a fitting tribute to a man who devoted much of his life to improving crop production, as well as helping those in need in the farming community, and an important part of our 150th anniversary celebrations," said Paul Burrows, RABI chief executive.

End

Notes for editors

PHOTO CALL

Monday 23 May - 9.30 a.m. at the John Joseph Mechi Garden RHW 30
'John Mechi' will be toasting the RABI and Tiptree anniversaries with a member of the new generation of enthusiastic young farmers – Anna Simpson from Yorkshire, voted *Farmers Weekly* 'sexiest young farmer of the year'.

The words carved in stone on the garden path - "The fruit of the land conserves life" - are those of John Mechi's moto:

Images available:

John Joseph Mechi;

the garden design;

work in progress at Writtle with Ben Wincott;

Rhubarb - Chris Newenham (farmer and director of Wilkin & Sons Ltd) with Alan Wreathall (RABI Essex county committee chairman) in the rhubarb field at Tiptree.

Crowns from this field will be featuring in the John Joseph Mechi garden at Chelsea.

Design details now available from www.writtle.ac.uk/chelsea2010

Further information available on www.rabi.org.uk; www.tiptree.com;
www.writtle.ac.uk; and www.rhs.org.uk

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