ADAM - zahradnická, a. s. entered the Czech market for ornamental plant material and grass seed in 1998 as a successor to EDEN, s.r.o. and Trees for the Heart of the Europe, s.r.o. Today, after 20 years of professional, systematic and patient work, they are among the most important suppliers not only of plants, but also of grass seeds and fertilizers both in the Czech Republic and abroad. Twenty years is a substantial part of life and work, which is why we decided to have this opportunity to talk to its product manager and board member, Zdeňek Kadrnožka.

1. **Twenty years have passed since you entered the market. What happened during them? What surprised you? What do you remember most? Did you start from scratch?**

As already indicated in the introduction, Adam-zahradnická a.s. was formed in 1998 by combining the business activities of the companies of the early landscaping Eden s.r.o. and the Prague Trees for the Heart of Europe, s.r.o. Both of these firms were founded in 1992. Trees for the Heart of Europe s.r.o. were dedicated to the trade in plant material, Eden s.r.o. had a significantly wider scope, its activities included garden and orchard realizations, arboristics, landscaping and trade in plant material. The 90s have been difficult to start a business for, above all, the absence of quality legislation. Adam-zahradnická a.s. emerged "on a greenfield" from purely private, domestic sources, no wild management privatizations or foreign capital. The advantage was an empty market looking for new products and foreign technology. I personally came to the position of product manager for Barenbrug grass seed sales in 1995. With a bit of hyperbole, I've become part of the post-revolutionary development of the lawn industry. In my early days I had a lot of help from intensive contacts with colleagues at Barenbrug, where I went on regular internships, most notably Mr Lex van den Weerd (product manager) became my mentor. Another person who influenced my professional life was Prof. Bureš. I took his semester classes at Mendel University in Brno. We were all trying to soak up as much information as possible about ornamental and sports lawns at the time. It was therefore necessary to combine theory in the form of study with trips abroad, where everything could be tracked in practice. Today, it's different, both in the possibilities of working and studying with a specialty in lawn maintenance.

1. **What are the biggest challenges you've had to overcome on your journey?**

It's never easy to start from scratch. When we started with Barenbrug grass seeds, only a few breeders and experts knew this company. Today, after more than 20 years, this brand is established in the marketplace and is known to most people who work in the industry. Of course, there is a huge effort, promotion and testing behind it. It's the same with other products. If they are good quality and they bring the client what he expects, then he will stay with you. This is why the selection of suppliers (partners) is key. We have been burned several times in the area too. In the beginning, clients' distrust of new products had to be overcome. Our effort was, and still is, to show that there is a price to be paid for quality. The credo right from the outset was to sell quality, which brought with it a higher price, so it was necessary to convince clients to try our products. I can say in good conscience that most of them have stayed with us to this day.

1. **Which of your actions do you consider for the most important?**

Crucial to the company's development was the golf boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, grass seeds of Barenbrug golf courses were established, such as Slavkov u Brna, Mnich, Sokolov, Český Krumlov, Kořenec, Beřovice, Beroun, Skalica, Harrachov and others. Most of these courses are our partners to this day. In recent years it has also been important for us to work with the Ypsilonka and Black Bridge golf courses, where we have managed to get these courses to a very good level in synergy with local management, which is reflected in their ratings and attendance. Thanks to said collaboration, here we also have the space to try new products.

Outside of the environment of golf, cooperation with League One football clubs from Olomouc is also very important, Jihlava, Brno, Plzeň, Ostrava and others. And, of course, even in the area of public greenery, over the years we have had the opportunity to participate in several prestigious projects, such as the regeneration of grass areas in the gardens of Prague Castle, reconstruction of the grass areas of the Memorial of the Victims of Fascism in Terezín or the establishment of grass areas of the roof gardens of the Gallery Harfa in Prague. We are also very pleased that the trees and shrubs supplied by our company are also growing in many places in our republic.

1. **What do you see as the main reason that your customers and clients - landscaping firms, designers and stewards of public and private greenery, sports clubs, towns, communities and other professionals who have anything to do with greenery and lawn farming - have grown so fond of you?**

As I mentioned above, the priority we entered the market with was product quality, although unfortunately at the expense of a higher price. When the client tested our products and found that it wasn't just advertising, and that the price actually matched the stated quality, it came back. The second reason from the outset was to try to add sophisticated advice to the business. At first, this effort was supported by visits from experts from partner firms and Barenbrug's offer to take a group of clients to Holland for a short internship each year. We were eventually able to do this counselling ourselves. Twenty years on today, I can say we have something to pass on. And if the problem goes beyond our means, we have someone to turn to abroad for advice or help.

1. **You are available in two subsidiaries - for Moravia and Slovakia in Lelekovice near Brno and for the Czechs in Bříství near Prague...**

From the outset, the goal was to build centers in the two largest cities. The centre in Lelekovice, near Brno, is a kind of centre for selling Adam-Travniky product, as well as a logistics centre for wholesale plant trade. Building a centre in the Bříství with cash and carry with plant material for 2 ha, facilities for a plant wholesaler and warehouses for the Adam-Travniky product has taken our options a significant step forward. The move also allows for further development of the entire company. The location of these two resorts makes our products more achievable for clients.

1. **You currently offer two comprehensive product lines - the Plant Material Shop, i.e. trees, shrubs, moulded woodland, solitaires, woodland and accompanying planting material, and a separate product line Travniky...**

The fact that the company offers two products is, in my judgment, a great advantage. It's like standing on two legs. Respectfully on three today, as sales of plants from cash and carry are taken as a standalone product with their specifics. This brings many benefits to the company, in turn when there is significant synergy between these products. It helps in both trade and financing. The result is greater economic stability for the company. This synergy helps to reach even those parts of the market where the seller wouldn't have it so easy. An example of this is why trees and shrubs supplied by our company decorate golf courses all over the country (Slavkov u Brna, Kravaře, Hostivař, Slapy, Beřovice, Svratka, Černý most, Český Krumlov). Needless to say, our goal is not to sell everything that comes on the market. That's why we carefully select products to include in our product lines. They must meet the quality requirements mentioned above, while being synergistic with existing ones. Another criteria for including a given product in our offering is our ability (capacity) to do expert advice to that product.

1. **What else is behind your success? Did you also have to deal with problems that caught you outright by surprise? What would you do differently, as you see it now, after 20 years?**

Success in any activity or field is made up of people. You can have a great idea or product, but only specific people can bring them to success. This was understood by our most successful worldwide known businessman, Tomas Bata. At a moment when people have the space to implement themselves and are properly rewarded for it, then success can come. Nowadays, when not much is worn of gentlemanliness and loyalty, when notions such as predatory, corruption, brazenness, when the ends justify the means, are bowed down in the media, concepts such as gentlemanliness, collegiality and loyalty are the foundation of our company's success.

I don't know if we would have done anything differently, rather I am sorry that we entered the business area with minimal knowledge of what lies ahead. Today, it's easier for the younger generation. My son, for example, studied sports management at the University of Birmingham, England, and what we have worked hard to educate in this area, often by way of trial errors, he takes for granted. This, from my perspective, is the biggest handicap of the business community in our country that has been doing business since the 1990s. Real capitalism (meaning business) will come with about the next generation.

1. **Would you pick up anyone from the team? Who are the inherent faces?**

Our staff team is not great (18 employee staff at both centres). And most of them have worked for the company for a number of years. This is indicative of their satisfaction. If you're happy, you have no reason to change. The indispensable faces are mainly colleagues from the board of directors Ing. Martin Hádek and Ing. Lukáš Mráz, then accountant Jana Obzinova, who have been at the company since its inception. Retailers Tomáš Obzina (selling plant material to Lelekovice) and Richard Dudek (selling plant material to Bříství), who have worked with us for more than 10 years, are also backers. Of course, it should be added that a trading firm is not without people who are not so visible (storekeepers, sales assistants and others) but without whom it would not be possible to operate. Thanks to them, too, for being Adam-zahradnická a.s. a successful company for 20 years.

1. **You know the everyday problems of Czech and Slovak greenkeepers... What is the trend of contemporary greenkeeping? A year ago, in the spring edition of Green 1/2017, you resented Eat Persistent RPR, as well as Melgreen Liquid products as well as some mixed extracts and new auxiliary plant products. You have brought an independent fertiliser rating (Mivena)...**

The general problem with contemporary golf in our countries is the low number of players. In comparable-sized countries (area and population) such as Austria, Holland Belgium is the number of active golfers an order of magnitude higher. This allows clubs to generate that kind of money to secure the operation of the pitch at a solid level while developing their activities. Unfortunately, there are significantly fewer golfers in our countries, which is reflected in the greenkeeping area. Only a minority of playgrounds have the opportunity to pay handsomely for the management of playground maintenance and support their expertise. Another problem is that even owners and investors have no idea when they build what pitch they want and what it will cost them to run their course. I visited the pitch in a number of countries and was surprised when, on one of them years ago in Holland, the owner proudly told me he had built a public playground, close to nature, which he runs as a low-cost with minimal resources and has 1,000 members. With us, public is slowly a vulgar word. Therefore, for all the efforts of the CSG and other entities to give greenkeepers a quality education and information, for many greenkeeper playground owners, he is just a better worker.

But these are the general problems of golf that can hardly be influenced by the greenkeeper. What he can influence, however, is to sell his expertise and project it into the state of his pitch. Capture current trends such as bio-based products, reducing stress and increasing disease resistance. That's why our company has come up with a Melgreen range of products. Equally, it is an effort by growers to offer more efficient varieties and grass mixtures that are better able to withstand stresses while having less demand for nutrients and water, hence RPR.

1. **How do you see the evolution of the company towards the next few years?**

It will be important to capitalise on the charged experience. Since most company executives have passed 50 or are coming at it in mile-long strides, this is obvious. I am thinking for myself on a 10-year horizon, when I am about to reach retirement age. It's important to say that the company is on a solid footing, it's anchored in the market, the management has enough experience, expertise and it makes a well-matched team, the products are quality and sufficiently presented, so I see the next ten years optimistically. It is also important at the right moment to bring in the next generation of managers who will not allow us to become rigid. And I can safely say that this, too, is gradually happening.