

Sustainable Potatoes

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR POTATO FARMING



Inside:

- From the LEAF Chief Executive
- Farming the LEAF Way
- LEAF at Luffness Mains
- LEAF Marque Grower Spotlight
- Water Use and Sustainability

Sustainable Potatoes

We've been working with our partners across the potato industry for many years. We're now looking to the future, and tackling the challenges that face the industry in the coming years.



From the LEAF Chief Executive

The Water Framework Directive, cross-compliance and CAP reforms mean there are more reasons than ever before to ensure potato production is environmentally sustainable. LEAF's Integrated Farm Management helps farmers follow best practice in potato production, enabling them to manage the environmental risks and maximise the opportunities of their industry.

Against a backdrop of consumers who are increasingly interested in the provenance of their food, those who can demonstrate continual improvement and that they are working harmoniously with the environment, through the LEAF Marque, will find greater marketing and production benefits.

The potato sector presents its own unique diffuse water pollution risks because of soil structural issues and the use of specific pesticides and nutrients. LEAF's recently launched Water Management Tool, together with our existing resources, offer farmers practical ways to plan and manage different options in order to reduce these risks, as well as signposting growers towards ongoing improvement.

Take a look at what LEAF has to offer and how we are working in partnership with our farmer members to move their businesses forward.

Caroline Drummond
LEAF Chief Executive

Farming the LEAF Way



AH Worth and Co Ltd. farm 4,500 acres in Holbeach Marsh. They currently operate a six year rotation based around potatoes which they believe is sustainable. Before potatoes they grow peas, after potatoes they grow wheat then sugar beet, brassicas and salads. **Duncan Worth**, Managing Director at AH Worth, explains more.

We have been LEAF members since 1995 and a LEAF Demonstration Farm since 1997. We became a member because we believe in the principle of running a commercial farm in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable way; in our view, these are the founding principles of LEAF. In August this year we started our second five year ELS scheme. The environmental features worked on over the years enabled us to gain enough points in the first round of ELS without taking any land out of production. Unfortunately, this was not the case second time around!

We do not measure the economic benefits of LEAF membership, but we believe that we are no worse off than our local peer group. What we do know is that our farm is significantly more environmentally diverse than the majority of local businesses. The number of hedges, spinneys, and trees we have all enhance the environmental value of our farm without affecting



the economic performance. We are also proud to share these benefits with the local community by, amongst other things, opening our doors on Open Farm Sunday. This is a popular event, especially for primary school children and is a fulfilling event for our team.

We are also LEAF Marque certified. This accreditation opens the door to more customers and shows the wider world that you can farm in a commercial way and look after the environment. Ongoing, it would be nice to think that having been audited to this environmental standard, the information could be used by government authorities when determining compliance under any new European payment rules.

In our view, being members of LEAF and being LEAF Marque certified adds value to our farming business. LEAF's Integrated Farm Management is a key building block in helping our strategy of farming a commercial farm in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable way. Given the effort and the high profile and influence that LEAF has within the industry and Government, both in the UK and Europe, the membership fee of £280 per annum is amazingly good value for money. So is £70 for a farm under 300 acres.

LEAF at Luffness Mains



Situated in the fertile countryside of East Lothian, Luffness Mains is a leading arable farm business, growing top quality potatoes for the fresh retail market and a variety of other crops. **Allan Stevenson**, Owner and Director at Luffness Mains, explains the importance of LEAF to his business.

Potatoes have been grown at Luffness Mains, in East Lothian by the Stevenson family for 98 years. Today, our focus is on growing a range of pre-packing varieties for supply mainly to Tesco through Greenvale AP. We grow over 500 acres of potatoes each year, with Vales Emerald 1st earlies supplied in early June to launch the new fresh potato season in Scotland with a big branded Luffness Mains promotion in Tesco, as shown below.



Consumers love this local connection and are quite precious about their 'tatties' at this time of year. Launching the potato season may seem an odd concept, but it delivers early sales to us and is really popular with our customers.

We have been members of LEAF for many years, but in 2006 we achieved LEAF Marque certification and yet we have never sold any of our own brand produce directly to consumers. So why did we do this? Our business was smaller than it is today and we needed to create points of difference that were of value to our customers. So we decided to support and brand the business with some new capabilities and create a reputation for being much more than just a potato farm.

One of the other key decisions was to go for LEAF Marque certification, which allowed us to answer the questions, 'What does the brand stand for?' and 'What is the identity of the brand?' Being an arable farm on the east coast of Scotland with fairly flat land and no major rivers or woodland nearby you might think that we have few environmental features, but this is absolutely not the case. With a major SSSI on our boundary, we have a wide range of environmental features and species diversity on the farm. What was missing was the integration of this into the business strategy and into the daily operations of the farm and the work of our staff working on the land. We

had every accreditation and assurance badge in farming, but needed LEAF Marque to make it holistic and in tune with our future world and consumer preferences.

The benefits of this approach are now becoming clear, with an embedded performance standard in the business that is much higher than before and a better reputation that has helped us in building strength into our relationships with our customers.

Another benefit is that LEAF Marque has helped us to focus on the environmental sustainability of our farm, which is rapidly becoming more important and is helping to make the business more efficient by focusing on energy use and reducing inputs.

Last year, we built a new potato cold store and grain

store, and added a fully equipped QC facility to help our interface with our customers. We also had the idea of creating a 'LEAF room' as a showcase for our business, which was opened, with the rest of the new facility, by Richard Lochhead, Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment.



This space combines a staff facility for meeting in the morning and mealtimes when on the farm, with a place for meetings and training. It is also useful for our many visitors as a starting point for discussion about the farm, as the culture of LEAF is all over the walls!

“ I am very proud that we are LEAF Marque certified, as it represents so much of my personal values applied to farming practice and is good for business. ”

As Chairman of the Potato Council, I can see the challenges facing our industry in meeting our share of agriculture's commitment to GHG reduction. There is a role for the Potato Council in helping our levy payers through our research and knowledge transfer programmes. But, meeting the highest assurance standards, such as LEAF Marque, makes this challenge easier as it helps us to address the key issues in a structured way.

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[LEAF Marque grower spotlight] Carroll's Heritage Potatoes



Carroll's Heritage Potatoes produce old variety potatoes, such as the Salad Blue and the Pink Fir Apple, all from Tiptoe Farm in Northumberland - which is also a LEAF Demonstration Farm. Farm Director, **Anthony Carroll**, talks about what LEAF brings to his business and his weakness for Arran Victory Roasties!

How long have you been involved with LEAF?

Tiptoe Farm has been involved with LEAF for nearly 18 years.

Why LEAF? LEAF represents how you can farm professionally and profitably in balance with the environment and looking after the countryside at the same time. At first we were just a member of LEAF, then we progressed to becoming LEAF Marque certified, and now we are also a LEAF Demonstration Farm! We have visitors to the farm and we hope to communicate the LEAF principles.

What made you go down the LEAF Marque route?

Providing us with guidance, and helping us improve our environmental performance without being judgmental. Also, raising issues that we may not have looked at otherwise.

What does it offer your business? Showing all our customers the traceability of Carroll's Heritage Potatoes, and the rest of the farm the wildlife, habitat, and landscape features. LEAF provides us with a recognized voice, much support from the team at the LEAF office, and a team of other like minded LEAF growers.

Future plans for the business? To maintain LEAF Marque and build on the visitors that come to the farm.

How do you see the potato industry in 10 years?

Difficult question! My instant thoughts are that there may be fewer and bigger growers, as well as larger packers. All being well, our type of niche potato business will fit around edges!

If you were to pick your favourite heritage potato, what would be it be and why?

I like them all, but if pushed I have a weakness for my wife's Arran Victory Roasties! The floury dry texture means they are crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside! Then there is the Pink Fir Apple, which have a distinctive flavour and waxy texture and are fab in salads. Each one of our varieties offers something different and different ways to cook. I love them all!

To find out more about Carroll's Heritage Potatoes, where to buy them and to visit the farm, go to www.heritage-potatoes.co.uk



What does Integrated Farm Management mean to you?

Using all the tools available in the box to provide options for varieties, fertilizer, cultivation techniques and rotational ploughing. Looking for different ways of spreading risk and getting away from monoculture.

Lucy & Anthony
Carroll's
HERITAGE
POTATOES
...potatoes like they used to taste

Water Use and Sustainability



Alan Wilson, Waitrose Technical Manager, Agronomy, discusses the hot topic of water use in the potato industry. Looking at the problems farmers face currently and the future of water use in the industry, Alan brings Waitrose's priorities in water efficiency to the fore.

Water is the key element in modern farming, if yield potential is to be realised. The application of artificial fertilisers and water, have played a central role in the production of affordable food. However, water as a resource is under close scrutiny and further restrictive controls for field crops are inevitable. LEAF has taken a leading role in recognising the importance of water sustainability.

LEAF is also pragmatic in appreciating that any reduction in



water use requires an approach that combines the ability to capture and store water along with more efficient scheduling and application efficiency. An expensive investment, but one that can make the difference between success or failure. Climate change may be debatable but the excesses of the past few years are a reminder of the harsh unpredictability of farming.

Having the measurement of water use efficiency as a Critical Failure Point in the LEAF Marque Audit, meets the requirements of the new Waitrose water policy on improving water use against marketable yield. When this is done it shows some large variations between crops. For example, a crop of Maris Piper on a similar soil type receiving 80mm of applied water, may yield the same (22t/ac gross) compared to a crop receiving 100mm - 20% less water. The difference is often accounted for by more efficient water application, usually a little less, but more often is required so reducing water loss to evaporation and run off.

More precise irrigation scheduling - experience still suggests that growers should actually use the systems rather than have a system for compliance. I believe over irrigation on potato crops is a frequent event and the detrimental effect on quality, especially in the case of high rainfall events and more precise applications, would buffer against this.

As we are likely to expect more 'swings' in temperatures and rainfall events during a growing season, being able to track actual water use is more important. This is particularly critical as potato crops tend to shut down above 25-26°C and some scheduling systems don't account for this accurately enough and assume crops are still requiring water when they do not.

Finally, we as an industry need to be more aware of why we are using water with so much being devoted to scab

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control. This is something Waitrose is most concerned about and greater focus is being placed on soil quality as a solution and a more appropriate final specification.

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The LEAF Marque: Grow your business

The LEAF Marque is based on environmentally responsible Integrated Farm Management (IFM) principles which support you in producing good food, with care and to high environmental standards. Good rotations are at the heart of IFM and can reduce reliance on pesticides and improve soil quality. This is possible whether you farm on your own land or rented land. The LEAF Marque standard enables growers who rent land to become certified. Take a look at our standards that outline the use of rented land and land that is rented out by the certified business at www.leafmarque.com.

About LEAF

LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) promotes environmentally responsible farming. We help farmers produce good food, with care and to high environmental standards, identified in-store by the LEAF Marque logo. We build public understanding and trust of food and farming in a number of ways, including Open Farm Sunday and visits to our national network of Demonstration Farms.

Membership

LEAF is a charity and membership organisation. LEAF members receive a range of benefits including the LEAF Audit, field events, visits to Demonstration Farms, as well as regular newsletters. Becoming a LEAF member is also the first step to becoming LEAF Marque accredited.

Speak Out – the LEAF communications initiative

LEAF's 'Speak Out' initiative encourages farmers to improve their communication skills and provides them with the know-how to explain 'what they do and why they do it.' Speak Out is a self-help CD-Rom that has already helped thousands of farmers tell their story. LEAF also arranges communications training events for farmers.

Making your Marque – The LEAF Marque

LEAF Marque is an assurance scheme based on LEAF farming principles. You can buy food grown on some of our members' farms in retail outlets across the country. Food carrying the LEAF Marque logo has been grown by farmers who are committed to improving the environment for the benefit of the countryside. LEAF Marque operates both in the UK and globally and is increasingly getting wide spread support throughout the food chain. See www.leafuk.org for more information.



LEAF's Integrated Farm Management (IFM) is a farming system which is environmentally and socially responsible and ensures the continuity of supply of safe, affordable food, while conserving and enhancing the wildlife of the countryside for future generations.

LEAF's Demonstration Farms and Innovation Centres

Our Demonstration Farms are working farms committed to sustainable farming practices and our LEAF Innovation Centres pioneer new approaches to push forward the boundaries of IFM through research and development. All these sites proudly demonstrate best practice Integrated Farm Management to a variety of different groups.

LEAF's Technical Tools

LEAF produces a range of practical management tools for farmers such as, the LEAF Audit, LEAF's Green Box, LEAF's Water Management Tool and 'Simply Sustainable Soils' guide book, all helping them adopt the sustainable farming practices of Integrated Farm Management.

Outreach

For the last 6 years LEAF has encouraged nearly one million members of the public out on to farms across the UK through Open Farm Sunday, the farming industry's annual open day. See www.openfarm-sunday.org for more information.

LEAF and the Sensory Trust are working together on the Let Nature Feed Your Senses project to provide opportunities for those deprived of opportunities to connect with nature and the countryside, through food and farming. The project involves sensory rich visits to farms and nature reserves across England. See www.letnature-feedyoursenses.org.



Integrated Farm Management

Join LEAF today

TECHNICAL EVENTS • DEMONSTRATION FARMS • SPEAK OUT • LEAF MARQUE • LEAF AUDIT • GREEN BOX

Go to www.leafuk.org and join online!