
**The effect and impact of LEAF Marque certification in
the delivery of more sustainable farming: a study to
understand the added value to farmers**

A summary report prepared by the CCRI for LEAF

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Introduction

The provision of robust, transparent and independent evaluation to support the claims that an organisation makes is a vital part of continual growth and improvement. It also underpins an organisation's credibility, builds capacity and strengthens accountability to stakeholders. This research study, commissioned by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming), aimed to evaluate the impact and added value to farmers of LEAF Marque certification. It builds on previous work the CCRI carried out in 2010 which looked more broadly at the benefits to farmers of LEAF membership.

Examining the financial, environmental and social benefits of LEAF Marque certification were key aims of this study, but we also heard from farmers, who explained in their own words, how LEAF Marque certification is making a difference to their lives and their businesses. Our grateful thanks to all the farmers who gave their time so willingly.

The study showed that businesses participating in LEAF Marque certification are gaining value from it. In many cases, it reached beyond their initial motivations for joining and helped them develop their businesses in ways they would not previously have considered. Many are actively engaged in various forms of innovation as they re-imagine their businesses to become more resilient in order to meet the demands of the present, and anticipate future opportunities. LEAF Marque certification can represent a powerful catalyst for change. This is a summary of our findings.

“The nice thing about LEAF [Marque] compared to the other [assurance schemes] is that it is a practical audit and it is very, very environmentally focused.” (Anthony Snell, A J and C I Snell)

“There are so many [benefits], and they are so subtle it is hard to choose one particular thing... LEAF has made us go a lot further than we would have gone.” (Farmer 1)

Methodology

37 farmers were interviewed for study, including 12 who are featured in case studies. A broad range of farm types took part including arable, horticultural, livestock and mixed farms; these included family farms, estates, partnerships and limited companies. A 'mixed methods' methodology was used, relying on three bodies of interrelated data obtained from a questionnaire, analysis of narrative from participants and case studies which focused on specific farm enterprises in the UK, Spain and Senegal.

LEAF Marque and Integrated Farm Management

LEAF Marque is an environmental assurance system recognising more sustainably farmed products. LEAF Marque certification covers the whole farm business and applies to all products from the business.

The principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) underpin the requirements of LEAF Marque certification, as set out in the LEAF Marque Standard. IFM is a **whole farm business approach that delivers more sustainable farming**. Modern technology and traditional methods are used with the goal of

delivering a prosperous farming that enriches the environment and engages local communities. A farm business managed to IFM principles will demonstrate site-specific and continuous improvement across the whole farm including: Organisation and Planning, Soil Management and Fertility, Crop Health and Protection, Pollution Control and By-Product Management, Animal Husbandry, Energy Efficiency, Water Management, Landscape and Nature Conservation and Community Engagement.



The LEAF Marque assurance system is run by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming), a **leading global organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming**. LEAF works with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers to inspire and enable sustainable farming practices that are prosperous, enrich the environment and engage with local communities. As well as managing the LEAF Marque assurance system, LEAF also drives forward the uptake of more sustainable farming practices through **knowledge generation and exchange based around its network of Demonstration Farms and Innovation Centres**, the provision of management tools and guidance, and through its various public outreach initiatives including – LEAF Open Farm Sunday.

Main Findings

All participants in the study found value in LEAF Marque which reached beyond their initial motivations for joining the system, and helped them develop their enterprises. While many of the benefits that participants found in being LEAF Marque certified are specific to their businesses and circumstances, we identified a number of similar shared advantages that were common across all business types.

“Historically, environmental concerns were often changing and we have since found that LEAF Marque has given us a framework to manage the complete sustainability agenda across a very complicated international supply base.... It just captures everything that a farm needs to do.” (Harry Wilder, Barfoots Senegal)

Opening up new market opportunities

LEAF Marque certification provides **valuable market opportunities**. The majority of participants reported **improved access to market opportunities**, with some also receiving a **price premium**. **Improved incomes** and **better quality products** was also reported in a third of participants. LEAF Marque was also reported to help farms access other income streams, such as through agri-environmental schemes. Other reported reasons for becoming LEAF Marque certified were to demonstrate environmental credentials or to embed a dynamic of innovation into the business.

“[LEAF Marque certification helps] to raise standards and raising standards is good; it does put our business in the UK above many of competitors abroad.” (Anthony Snell, A J and C I Snell)

Improved Income

Focusing on IFM, the principles on which the LEAF Marque Standard is based, was shown to make operations more efficient, often resulting in significant financial savings for members. As an example, in energy efficiency, some participants report making **savings of between £10,000 - £17,000 per year**.

“[LEAF Marque provides] a wonderful frame from which to make incremental savings.” (Farmer 7)

Similarly, a number of farmers reported cost savings due to a shift towards more biological methods of pest control, improved biodiversity and a general decrease in the use of plant protection products.

Improved Biodiversity

Being LEAF Marque certified was seen by participants in the research study to have had noticeable impacts on the conservation values of their land and the wider environment. **66% of participants reported that biodiversity on their land have improved because of LEAF Marque certification** reporting marked improvements in observed farmland birds, insects and mammals.

Improved Networking

LEAF Marque certification provides opportunities for farmers and growers to network with their peers, to exchange relevant expertise and information, as well as opportunities for personal growth. For those who take up these networking opportunities, this is seen as a critical benefit to them and the business. LEAF Open Farm Sunday enables LEAF Marque certified businesses to showcase their activities, establishing and enhancing good-will and understanding in the local community, which results in

practical benefits as well as building pride in the farm team. Supported by training opportunities, such as LEAF's Speak Out training, **LEAF Marque certified farmers are increasingly representing their businesses** and the industry more broadly in a bottom-up effort to control the narrative about food and farming.

"Our biggest sense of achievement is how we interact with the public and the most rewarding and the biggest change." (Farmer 1)

In summary, those participating in LEAF Marque report that it **offers a systematic way for them to continuously improve the operations of their business, saving them money, improving the environment, giving them new social connections and a wider set of business opportunities**. In this combination of benefits, they feel LEAF Marque certification offers a unique opportunity to develop their businesses whilst contributing to the advancement of the wider agricultural industry.

Integrated Farm Management in Focus

Organisation and Planning



A widespread appreciation of the role that LEAF Marque certification plays in **improving the strategic planning of businesses** was seen during the study. For many respondents, this was the key benefit of the system in enabling them to improve other areas of their business. The research participants reported that LEAF Marque empowers managers of the business to engage in critical reflection on the strategic direction of their activities, make fewer mistakes and communicate better with staff. LEAF Marque has also made it easier for farmers to deal with other compliance schemes, through pre-prepared paperwork and building confidence - **69% of respondents said LEAF Marque helped with other regulations and agri-environmental schemes**.

"[LEAF Marque] has changed the way we communicate with staff; staff environmental awareness has been raised, I really like that part of LEAF – and we are happy to go beyond that. Our workers are the most valuable thing on the farm, without our workers we won't have anything, they are right at the top of our agenda." (Grower 13)

Soil Management and Fertility



64% of participants agreed that since becoming LEAF Marque certified the **condition of the soil had improved**. All LEAF Marque certified businesses who regularly test the soil organic matter saw improvements and almost all participants had observed improvements in the condition of the soil and the life within it, either through formal

testing and experimental work in collaboration with research organisations, or through counting earthworms.

“Soil structures are much better, which is linked to plants through using nutrition better, holding more water, and soils are a lot easier to cultivate, reducing time, labour, fuels and machinery wear.” (Farmer 1)

Crop Health and Protection



With Crop Health and Protection, while reported strategies are site-specific, an **emphasis on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and its associated benefits were clear among the LEAF Marque certified businesses.** Firstly, a reduction in the use of plant protection products (PPPs) of between 8-20% was reported which resulted in cost savings. A trend was seen in using alternatives such as weed-suppressing green manures, and changing tillage practices and rotations. Secondly, improved biodiversity on LEAF Marque certified businesses was viewed as an important tool in pest management, with careful thought being given to encouraging pollinators, boosting populations of beneficial insects and protecting predators. Finally, participants reported an increased focus on the management and prevention of pest resistance.

“LEAF Marque strengthened our focus, it demands you look at IPM of your pests in a more detailed manner.” (Damien Lascelles, Royalcress SA)

Pollution Control and By-Product Management



With such a public focus on food waste, LEAF Marque certified businesses were keen to report on their approaches to waste management. **32% of participants reduce waste through secondary markets** for their produce and **11% send their waste product to anaerobic digestion (AD) units** to generate energy and the nutrients can be returned to the soil via the digestate. LEAF Marque certified businesses also recognised the importance of preventing pollution events through improved physical security around storage facilities (bundling and Biobeds were given as examples), skilled staff, avoiding some chemicals altogether and working with responsible bodies such as national parks, Natural England and water companies.

“Excess crop? It is either sent to a local food bank or the local zoo, we are members of the local zoo, and apparently, it is a favourite of the hippos.” (Damien Lascelles, Royalcress SA)

Animal Husbandry



LEAF Marque certified businesses who reared livestock had animal welfare and environmental aspects, such as conservation grazing and sustainably sourcing feed, as key focuses for their businesses. They were **consistent in viewing the welfare of their animals as being of the highest priority** with consumers expecting very high levels of welfare. Likewise, participants were aware that poor animal health reduced the optimal performance of the business through increased costs and lower productivity.

“Does someone buy pork from us because of our carbon [neutral] status? Do they buy from us because of the high welfare standards? No, they want to buy a tasty, ethically sourced product that doesn’t mean just the high animal welfare, it means everything that goes with it, it is not just one element.” (Alec Mercer, Mercer Farming – Packington Freerange)

Energy Efficiency



The opportunities for saving on energy and gaining income through energy generation are considerable for LEAF Marque certified businesses. 54% of participants said that the ‘attention to detail mindset’ required to become **LEAF Marque certified had led to improvements in the overall energy efficiency of their businesses**, including savings from greater fuel efficiency and reduced electricity use. The generation of renewable energy was reported by 51%, which brings with it the opportunity of extra income when excess electricity is sold. Farmers also reported that greater efficiency in the use of vehicles had led to reduced usage of fossil fuels.

“We now match the machinery to the tractor in a way that we never did before.” (Grower 22)

Water Management



In many instances, **LEAF Marque certification led to businesses thinking strategically about the use of water and its broader impacts**. Managing water is not just ensuring an adequate supply but also ensuring that water leaving and entering the farm is of acceptable standards, as well as used prudently on the farm or in the greenhouses. LEAF Marque certified businesses reported using a range of precision management options such as only irrigating to start germination, controlling humidity in greenhouses, using ultraviolet light to lower bacterial levels in the water for salad crops, changing the pH of water for poultry production and self-sufficiency for polytunnels through rainwater harvesting.

“We have a river through the farm and we are working to improve [it], by fencing it out and protecting the banks - doing more for wildlife - this comes directly from [becoming] LEAF [Marque certified].” (Farmer 10)

Landscape and Nature Conservation



Being LEAF Marque certified had noticeable impacts on the conservation values of the land and the wider environment. Two thirds of participants reported that **biodiversity on their land had improved because of LEAF Marque certification**, an increased proportion compared to responses given to a similar independent survey conducted in 2010. Where participants were monitoring on-farm, there were increases seen in birds, insects, bats and other mammals. Planting trees and hedges was seen to be a priority for LEAF Marque certified businesses with 53% reporting **improvements to the landscape value of their land**.

“[LEAF Marque] does nudge us in the greener direction we want to go, I’m not saying we are the greenest business, but I have confidence that we are making improvement.” (Charles Matts, Brixworth Farming)

Community Engagement



All participants were aware of the importance of better engagement with the wider community in order to promote better public understanding and appreciation. Many remarked on the sense of pride they feel in ‘showing off’ their businesses. 71% said that the social aspects of the LEAF Marque certification process had led to **improved relationships with the public** through hosting farm visits, maintaining footpaths and having a strong social media presence. Participants cited the resulting benefits to include better understanding by the community, resolution of complaints, sympathetic hearings of planning issues, better relationships when recruiting new members of staff, and improved farm sales. An improved engagement with the wider agricultural sector was also reported by 47% of participants. Being a member of LEAF (the charity) also allows LEAF Marque certified businesses to access LEAF’s public engagement activities, such as LEAF Open Farm Sunday, training and events. LEAF events were seen to be an opportunity to learn from other growers and producers, while training opportunities, such as LEAF’s Speak Out, allowed farmers to take control of the narrative around agriculture. Participants were unanimous in their support for the way LEAF promotes public engagement – many saw this as of strategic importance for their business.

“I think that farmers often have a view that the general public don’t know what happens on farms, but we have had 3500 people come [to our LEAF Open Farm Sunday event] and want to learn what happens on the farm. I think that people would like to know more but don’t have the opportunity to learn.” (Alec Mercer, Mercer Farming – Packington Freerange)

Conclusions

Amongst the farmers who participated in this study, there was consistent and sustained support for LEAF Marque and an appreciation of the financial, environmental and social contributions it makes to their businesses. LEAF Marque certified businesses were united in their commitment to producing high quality, affordable food via more sustainable farming methods. This should be commended.

“LEAF have been very, very helpful in giving information; I would say that they have been faultless in that.” (Nick Bragg, Frogmary Green Farm)

The main advantages of LEAF Marque certification, identified in this study, can be summarised as follows:

- LEAF Marque certification allows managers to engage in **critical reflection on the strategic direction** of their activities
- LEAF Marque opens up **valuable market opportunities**; this may be in the form of a premium or access to higher value supply chains
- The focus on Integrated Farm Management and close attention to detail **results in incremental savings**
- The focus of LEAF Marque on biodiversity and conservation management results in **marked improvements in farmland birds, insects and mammals**
- LEAF Marque, working with other pressures, has **changed the emphasis on crop protection towards Integrated Pest Management**
- The integration of farming operations realises synergies, with farmers shifting towards **biological controls and ecosystem management**
- The process of becoming LEAF Marque certified **builds confidence** in dealing with other compliance schemes
- LEAF Marque provides opportunities for farmers and growers to **network with peers and exchange information and experience**
- LEAF Open Farm Sunday provides opportunities for LEAF Marque certified businesses to **engage with their local communities**
- Empowered by training around LEAF Marque, LEAF Marque certified businesses are increasingly representing their businesses and the industry more broadly in a bottom-up effort to **control the narrative around sustainable food and farming.**

Next steps

Whilst we identified an overall level of support for LEAF Marque certification, the following areas were highlighted as requiring further focus:

- Whilst public awareness of LEAF Marque and what it stands for is growing rapidly, participants felt that more consumer facing work was needed in order to drive demand.
- LEAF Marque certification was identified as an effective channel through which farmers could secure premium contracts. There is much scope to expand these opportunities across all sectors.
- The multiplicity of audits and assurance schemes, which frequently duplicate requirements, was highlighted by many participants as an area which needed to be recognised and addressed by the whole farming industry.

Acknowledgements

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The CCRI research team was Matt Reed, Nick Lewis and Janet Dwyer.

Further Information

This is a summary of the full report: Reed,M., Lewis,N., Dwyer, J (2017) **“The effect and impact of LEAF Marque in the delivery of more sustainable farming: a study to understand the added value to farmers.”** The CCRI, Gloucester, England.

Both the summary report and the full report can be downloaded at www.leafuk.org

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