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# LEAF'S RESPONSE

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

Carried out by The Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI)

May 2017



## Background

On September 25th 2015, world leaders formally adopted a set of Sustainable Development Goals to **end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all** as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Understanding the extent to which LEAF Marque is contributing to these global efforts relies on the provision of a robust monitoring and evaluation programme, underpinned by the provision of transparent, impartial and consistent evidence to support our claims.

This study, carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), aimed to provide an independent evaluation of the impact and added value to farmers from LEAF Marque certification. As well as examining the financial, environmental and social benefits, we also wanted to hear LEAF Marque certified growers explain in their own words what difference certification was making to their lives and their businesses. Some of these narratives were developed into Case Studies to give a detailed insight into how LEAF Marque businesses operate.

We feel that this independent study and the resulting report met all these aims. CCRI sought prior approval from the participants before attributing all quotes and figures to individual businesses. The interviewers did not limit their enquires solely into the attributed benefits of LEAF Marque certification but also into the associated benefits that membership of LEAF (the charity) offers.

We would like to thank the 37 LEAF Marque certified businesses that took part in the study, including 12 who were featured as case studies. A broad range of businesses and farm types were included providing a good representation of the 1,013 businesses who are currently LEAF Marque certified. As with any study involving a subgroup of members, there are some limitations in the conclusions that can be drawn from this purposeful and stratified sample of LEAF Marque certified businesses. We are also aware that all businesses will be effected by a range of issues such as finance regulations, customer requirements, climatic and environmental factors; LEAF Marque certification is only one of the areas influencing a business's activity.

As a Full Member of the ISEAL Alliance, LEAF is committed to systematically monitoring, researching and reporting on the outcomes of the LEAF Marque assurance system. The findings of our monitoring and evaluation programme helps inform our stakeholders and drive change and improvement.

The full report '**The effect and impact of LEAF Marque in the delivery of more sustainable farming: a study to understand the added value to farmers**' and summary of key findings can be found at [www.leafuk.org](http://www.leafuk.org).

## Overview: LEAF, LEAF Marque and Integrated Farm Management

### About LEAF

LEAF is the leading organisation delivering sustainable food and farming. We work with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers, to inspire and enable sustainable farming that is prosperous, enriches the environment and engages local communities. We do this through developing and promoting **Integrated Farm Management** in three core pillars:

- **Facilitating knowledge generation and exchange amongst farmers and researchers** through our network of LEAF Demonstration Farms and Innovation Centres; farm business management tools and events.
- **Developing Market Opportunities** through the LEAF Marque Standard.
- **Engaging the public in sustainable food and farming** through Open Farm Sunday, Open Farm School Days, resources and training.

### Our Vision

A world that is farming, eating and living sustainably.

### Our Mission

To inspire and enable sustainable farming that is prosperous, enriches the environment and engages local communities.

### About LEAF Marque

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

### About Integrated Farm Management

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 food and farming**. It uses the best of modern technology and traditional methods to deliver 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.



## Main Findings

We are delighted to see that **all participants in the study found value in being LEAF Marque certified**. They reported that it had reached beyond their initial motivations for joining the system and helped them to develop their enterprises in ways they may not have considered previously. While it should be noted that in many cases the essential benefits arising from LEAF Marque certification were individualised, there were also many benefits shared by all participants in the study.

The results of the study are worth celebrating and in many cases, we felt the findings correlated with our own experiences. Below is a summary of the main findings:

### LEAF Marque certification provides valuable market opportunities

In this volatile climate, it is encouraging to see participants reporting that LEAF Marque certification delivers a number of financial benefits including increased incomes, price premiums, valuable market opportunities, better quality products and **cost savings for example of between £10,000-£17,000 per year**. LEAF Marque certification was also seen to provide the **confidence and resources** for farmers to deal with compliance with other regulations, agri-environment schemes, assurance systems and other compliance schemes, often resulting in businesses qualifying for other forms of income streams.

### LEAF Marque certification improves strategic planning of the business

LEAF Marque certification was directly attributed to **enabling managers to critically analyse the strategic direction of their businesses** and highlight areas of improvement. LEAF Marque certified businesses also reported improved communication with their staff, often the most valuable asset of the business.

### LEAF Marque certification improves on-farm biodiversity

The focus of biodiversity and conservation management within the LEAF Marque Standard leads to **noticeable improvements to the conservation and wider environmental value** of LEAF Marque certified businesses. Participants in the study were able to link biodiversity benefits directly to LEAF membership or LEAF Marque certification, which had increased since the 2010 research. Where participants were monitoring on-farm biodiversity, there were increases in farmland birds, insects and mammals.

### LEAF Marque certification improves soil condition

There was widespread appreciation of the role that LEAF Marque certification plays in improving soil management strategies, leading to improved soil structure, better water filtration and improved fertility. The attention to detail demanded of Integrated Farm Management means that LEAF Marque certified farmers are carrying out regular testing to determine increases in soil organic matter, soil biodiversity and improvements in structure.

### **LEAF Marque certification promotes Integrated Pest Management**

LEAF Marque certification, working with other pressures, helps to **change the emphasis on crop protection towards Integrated Pest Management**, including a shift towards biological pest control and reduced use of Plant Protection Products (PPPs). This integrated approach was seen in the management of resistance in weeds and pests often resulting in a steady reduction in the use of fossil fuels and potentially polluting chemicals.

### **LEAF Marque certification improves relationships with the public**

LEAF Marque provides opportunities for farmers and growers to network with their peers, **to share relevant expertise and information, and provide opportunities for personal growth**. Increasingly, LEAF Marque certified businesses are representing themselves and the wider industry more broadly in order to control the narrative about food and farming. Through hosting farm visits, maintaining footpaths and having a strong social media presence, LEAF Marque certified growers reported that they were better understood by the community, had better relationships when recruiting new members of staff, and improved farm sales.

## Lessons Learnt

We welcome the findings of the report and the valuable insight it offers into the impact and added value to farmers from LEAF Marque certification.

Participants in the study were united in their commitment to producing high quality, affordable food via more sustainable farming methods. This should be commended. We are encouraged to see that LEAF Marque certification leads to significant financial benefits to farmers in relation to on-farm cost savings, additional income, market benefits and adherence with regulatory requirements.

### A framework for sustainable farming

The report rightly points out that the impact of LEAF Marque certification, and the principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) upon which it is based, are dependent on active, skilled and knowledgeable intervention from individual businesses. We have always positioned IFM as a framework that can be adapted to suit individual businesses and we are aware of the limitations associated with certification. That said, as a Full Member of the ISEAL Alliance, we are committed to an extensive and ongoing monitoring and evaluation programme in order to drive forward continual improvement amongst LEAF Marque certified businesses.

### Continual Improvement

Our work with ISEAL, as well as our collaboration with other organisations, will also help to address the issues the report raises around the repetitiveness of the many audits and assurance schemes that farmers undergo. For example, LEAF Marque certified businesses in England have been shown by the Environment Agency to be statistically less likely to cause environmental pollution and therefore are deprioritised from any planned or targeted visits as part of ‘earned recognition.’

It should also be noted that this is an industry-wide issue and LEAF, as an organisation, can only provide one part of the solution. That said, participants felt that the process of LEAF Marque certification had helped to raise confidence and ‘preparedness’ for other assurance schemes and compliance with wider industry regulations. This is certainly a benefit that we will be promoting more widely. In this way, we hope LEAF Marque goes some way to reduce the impact multiple audits have on individual businesses.

### Our Five Year-Strategy

Many participants report that their key motivation for becoming LEAF Marque certified was due to the price premium or market opportunities that result from certification. We recognise the importance of this to our current and prospective certified businesses and will continue to work with the wider industry to secure new and grow existing opportunities, looking at a wider range of LEAF Marque certified crops. Alongside this, we will work to grow industry and consumer recognition of the LEAF Marque assurance system.

### Wider industry engagement

The importance LEAF Marque certified businesses place on networking with their peers as well as communicating more widely with the farming industry and the general public has been made clear. As such we will continue to offer a varied programme of LEAF events aimed at generating knowledge exchange between our farmers and the wider industry and continue to engage with our stakeholders and wider industry representatives to promote LEAF Marque as a key driver to the delivery of more

sustainable food and farming. The overwhelming support for the way LEAF promotes public engagement is hugely encouraging.

## **Conclusions**

LEAF Marque certification empowers and enables farmers to make positive changes to more sustainable farming; it also allows them to celebrate and demonstrate their achievements in the market place. Change will be gradual. But the findings of this evaluation report indicate we are heading in the right direction.

The full report, summary and highlights can be downloaded at [www.leafuk.org](http://www.leafuk.org)

If you have any comments on the evaluation report, we would like to hear from you.

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