



Case Study: A J and C I Snell, Hereford, UK



Nestled in the hills of Herefordshire, the berry farm of Anthony and Christine Snell is responsible for 1300 tonnes of strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. They also grow 700 tonnes of blackcurrants, both conventional and organic. These berries arrive for consumers in fresh and frozen formats, with extensive freezing, packing and processing facilities on the site. Anthony and Christine were finalists in the 'Farmers Weekly' 'Specialist Crop Producer'

category in 2016, with the judges being particularly impressed by the "technical innovations and crop performance". The farm covers over 450 hectares of land now, a ten-fold increase from when Anthony and Christine started the business. They now employ 30 full-time staff and up to 300 seasonal staff, who pick fruit across the fields and in the poly tunnels which have extended the growing season through to November.

A quality producer

Anthony was very clear that the strategic focus has been to establish themselves as a quality producer, to "focus at the higher end of the market, with premium customers, premium varieties and a good name for quality and service." As part of that of that, they supply Marks and Spencer, Ribena, and Yeo Valley. While there is a focus on fresh produce, the role of frozen products is important as it allows a high-quality British product to be available all year round and balances the farm's



production, it is “same quality fruit, but we also use it in times when we are in overproduction”. Although supplying processors, particularly for blackcurrants Anthony is clear that British production is underpinned by very high standards and is distinct from, “just another volume producer, we focus on quality and have a very good team of people working here.”

The LEAF ethos

Anthony’s late Father was on the founding board of LEAF, and so he feels that the ethos of LEAF is deeply embedded in his approach to farming:

“We haven’t fundamentally changed anything because we are part of LEAF Marque, it is something that as a grower you understand - that you don’t want to cause soil compaction, you don’t want soil runoff, a lot of these are fundamental basic things that you as a responsible producer you do without being told.”

With the farm being involved in seven different audits, this is taking up a considerable amount of time and effort, which Anthony views have mixed results:

“We would be doing these things but having to go through proving that you are doing it is a lot of work and a lot of costs, but it is a requirement that most of our customers are wanting.”

But in a competitive global market there are upsides to the focus on accreditation and auditing:

“All of these audits are good in a way because they raise standards and raising standards is good, it does put our business in the UK above many of competitors abroad.”

Improving efficiencies

With a proud record of investments that have led to both greater efficiency and environmental improvements, such as PV solar on the packhouse roof, extensive use of rainfall to irrigate crops, and high levels of bird species present on the farm.

The Snell's look to combine a commercial orientation and environmental awareness and Anthony champions the greater efficiencies that can be found in larger enterprises:

“This is sometimes it is a bit of a misconception, people are critical of larger businesses, but you’ll find that a business that has reached a certain critical size which is a lot more efficient than a smaller business.”

Many of these businesses have been able to achievement the important twin goals of “providing affordable food and environmental improvements”. With berries increasing in popularity and part of a balanced diet, Anthony is pleased to be able to “promote something that is good for you.” In a context of audits and complexity he thinks that LEAF Marque might fulfil an important future role:

“What we would like in a perfect world is one audit, and if that was LEAF that would be great, the nice thing about LEAF compared to the others is that it is a practical audit and it is very, very environmentally focused.”