



## Case Study: Intercrop, UK and Spain

*"It is a bit like a fashion industry, things move and change quite rapidly, we spend a lot of time on trials and development because we are always looking to improve our offer."*

### Quality and innovation

Thane Goodrich's description of the parallels between the business of producing salad leaves and that of looking on trend at first seems surprising but as he explains the aesthetic demands, the need for quality and innovation it begins to make sense. Intercrop Ltd, at which Thane is the Innovation and Development Director, is celebrating 25 years of growing in 2017, and over 20 of being able to offer customers year-round production with their farms in Spain. With over 850 hectares in production, 400 in the UK and 450 in Spain, Intercrop are supplying over 40 varieties of leafy crops. After the rapid growth of bagged salads in the 1990s the focus has shifted to new production systems and varieties to improve quality and maintain value:

*"In recent history, value has been a big driver, and with investment in specialised harvesting equipment, we have managed to improve quality and maintain value in spinach."*

Such is the demand that Intercrop are now producing 100 tonnes per week, to meet the demand for spinach from consumers who see it as a good value leaf.

### Meeting customer requirements

Intercrop are always a step away from the retailer, as their produce needs to be washed and packed before being ready for the shelves. Encouraged to become LEAF Marque certified by customers, Thane recalls:

*"We looked at it, and we didn't think it was too onerous we were already doing a lot of it, ... LEAF Marque brought it all together into one format."*

Much of what was being asked for in the LEAF Marque Standard was already happening on the farm but, “LEAF gave us an independent label that demonstrated what we were doing as a farm.” Over the years, the LEAF Marque has become woven into the management of the farm:

*“It sits alongside what we do; it becomes part of what we do, it is like you don’t actually think about it.”*

The demands of leaf production, for not only a perfect leaf but one that is safe and uncontaminated means particular challenges and solutions when it comes to Integrated Farm Management. The salad beds are based on, “controlled wheelings, to minimise compaction to known areas, and we don’t plough between crops now, it is all with GPS so we can lift a crop and place the next one onto exactly the same place.”

### Focus on soil

The soil is a big focus, with continued use of barley as a winter cover crop, and green cover crops to help ensure there is no nitrogen leaching but also to protect the soil. Soil organic matter is a special focus as to control microbial contamination risks there are limits to grazing animals on the land and the use of animal manures. Intercrop has invested in regular monitoring, “we routinely analyse all our soils every year, I would say that we have been doing it in greater detail, we are doing more in-depth analysis of the micro-nutrients.” There is also an interest in micro-flora, but here Thane thinks that they butt up against the limits of our present knowledge, “one of the things we struggle with as an industry is having those benchmarks of what to measure in soils”. This absence means that the Intercrop team "still do a lot of work by spade" using their experience to make judgements.

### Encouraging biodiversity

While encouraging biodiversity takes place by leaving headlands and other areas that cannot be cropped efficiently, but primarily the focus is making sure that wildlife is "on the edge of the field rather than in the field". To reduce pesticide use, Intercrop is using floating barrier netting to exclude insects from the crop. The primary problem is the presence of the larvae of predatory insects being found by consumers in their salad, “Consumer won’t say I can see that you are doing all those great things for the environment if it is sat on your plate”. The focus is making sure that insects do not get into the crop.

Thane explains how being LEAF Marque certified helps them balance these demands to maintain value, produce an aesthetically perfect product, to ensure that it is safe and keeps up with changing demands. He sums this up as a commitment to quality:

***“A lot of what we do is making sure that quality is right, and if we don’t get that right we can forget everything else we do.”***