

MEET THE SUPPLIER

TOM AMERY Watercress farmer

"Watercress is full of good things like healthy mustard oils and phenethyl isothiocyanate – a bit of a mouthful but a potential weapon against cancer – and its delicious peppery flavour makes it one of the UK's most popular salad leaves, with a national market of about 90 tonnes a week.

I'm Technical Director for The Watercress Company, which has 14 farms in Dorset and Hampshire, as well as in Spain and Florida. We supply 40- to 50,000 bags a week to Waitrose nationally, via two processing companies which wash and bag the leaves.

We also produce wild rocket, baby spinach, ruby chard and baby leaf lettuce for mixed salad bags, as well as a 'regional' bag for 13 branches in the West Country. There's a growing market for organic watercress, too, which we grow on our UK farms throughout the year, although we also produce it overseas because demand is so high.

Our product is so tasty and healthy because it's always in store within 48 hours of cutting, usually much less. Freshness is vital because watercress perishes quickly.

The Waitrose buying team has been brilliant. It's the first supermarket I've come across that makes such a significant effort with a grower (remember, we supply the processor, who supplies Waitrose). We can contact the buyer, Claire Young, or the technical guys direct, which is very unusual, and they've really gone that extra step to help us put our ideas into action.

One of these ideas was our traceability website – www.yourwatercress.com – where customers can enter a serial number from their Waitrose watercress packet to find out which farm it came from, when it was harvested, and even who picked it. It's proving very popular." 🍴

Interview: Olivia Daly

This winter Waitrose launched a new organic watercress bunch, grown by The Watercress Company. This now means that our supermarkets are able to supply UK-grown organic watercress all year round.

