

A really important part of what happens at Thanet Earth is our harvesting of tomatoes all year round. To achieve a economically-sustainable yield in the winter months then we have to supplement the natural light that the plants receive. Both of the tomato glasshouses at Thanet Earth are equipped with growlights which provide the plants with a light intensity that replicates the light levels of a typical spring day. In total, our two operational lit greenhouses have some 20,000 lights at work. Each is around 1000W.

These lights are usually switched on by around midnight, and will stay on until the afternoon. The plants still need time in darkness as part of their photosynthesis process, so they 'sleep' from sunset through until we turn the lights on again during the night.

We use a system of blinds in the greenhouses which serve a number of purposes:

- They help focus the light down onto the crop
- They help prevent the heat escaping through the roof
- They help maintain ideal humidity levels

Whilst the manufacture of these blinds is extremely precise and the maximum coverage possible is provided, for ventilation purposes we have to leave small gaps where the blinds meet. The blinds are also not 'black-out' blinds. It's imperative that the blinds allow the humid air out and the dry air in. A blackout blind would not allow this; plant health and fruit quality would suffer. As with a blind on the window of a home, light will be visible from above, and a glow may be seen.

Our coastal setting brings with it some additional challenges - when a heavy, low mist covers the site then we seem to suffer from a visible night glow from the lit glasshouses. We have consulted experts in this field who have confirmed that this is caused by the escaping light being trapped and reflected repeatedly, thereby having a magnifying effect.

Whilst light pollution is a serious issue, it should be noted that the growlights are **not** used during key production times in Spring and Summer. Natural light is sufficient for our crops from around April through until August or September (depending on light levels and plant performance).

There are few dwellings in the immediate vicinity of Thanet Earth. By leaving the lights off until 11pm at the earliest, we aim to minimise any impact of the lights on our neighbours.

The growlights are essential for efficient, top quality production. Without this technology Thanet Earth would not be a viable business. With the downward pressure on food prices, efficiency and scale in production are key to remaining competitive in the marketplace. Britain's salad producing future is reliant on this lit method of production. As an ultra-efficient CHP electricity-generating plant too, Thanet Earth has sufficient generating capacity to power the lights using our own electricity.

Many people ask us about LED light technology. We have so far chosen not to use LEDs in our greenhouses for a number of reasons:

- Our plants benefit from the additional warmth of our sodium lights.
- Plant performance under LED lighting simply isn't as good as we find with our sodium lights.

- The light glow from LEDs is much more intense and would be purple in tone. This would take our night light emissions to extremes that neither we nor our neighbours would tolerate.

Our business has always sought to engage with our neighbours and to be open and honest about our production methods. If a neighbour is experiencing a particular irritation due to our lights then we are always happy to discuss potential solutions.

Our lights are working to help keep Britain producing salad crops, with significant employment and opportunity resulting from our site. We are proud of our crops and our production methods, and we're grateful for the overwhelming support we have received from local residents, from the local planning authority and from our customers.

Blinds in the roof prevent the majority of the light escaping, but there are necessary small gaps where they meet.



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