

TILLAGE

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Post-harvest stubble management

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Remember the rules around stubble cultivation.

Post-harvest cultivations are a useful tool to try to control problem weeds. When deciding which fields to cultivate and to what end, the following issues need to be considered:

- Dormancy status of the weed: some weeds need light to break dormancy, e.g., oilseed rape volunteers and wild oats, others need to be buried, e.g., sterile brome and blackgrass. Tailor your strategy, within the stubble cultivation rules.

BETWEEN

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- Remember that the rules around stubble cultivation state that between 20 and 25% of the cereal area on the holding must be left untouched for ground-nesting birds. Pick the fields where the appropriate weeds will benefit from being left on the soil surface to be eaten by birds, small mammals, etc.
- Don't forget that you must stubble cultivate within 10 days of the straw being removed. However, where late-harvested crops are grown, e.g., maize, beet, potatoes, or beans or cereals harvested after September 15, or if you are going to sow a winter crop before October 31, there is no need.
- Shallow cultivation is only applicable to counties Carlow, Cork, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath, Wexford, and Wicklow.
- Where cover crops are being established as part of the various schemes, these can be used to suppress the different weed species, but they are also a good way of trapping residual nitrogen (N) in the soil and preventing it from reaching watercourses.
- Aim to sow cover crops as soon as the straw is removed, where possible; a week's growth in August is worth two weeks in September.
- At the time of writing there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the Straw Incorporation Scheme (SIM) for 2024. Where the plan was to chop late-harvested cereal crops, perhaps a solution would be to chop the headlands regardless and bale the centre of the fields. Straw on the headlands tends to be driven on and so is usually the last to be dry enough to bale, so chopping the headlands in late-harvested cereal crops makes sense regardless of any scheme.
- The decision to bale or chop the straw should always be based on the economics of chopping the straw versus the price that can be achieved for baling the straw. While individual deals will be done for the straw, its value as an organic manure can be calculated based on the total amount of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) contained in the straw that is being returned to the soil. **Table 1** estimates the monetary value of straw based on the P and K value.
- Where straw is chopped there are also the other benefits that are more difficult to calculate, such as the

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biological and physical improvements to the soil, especially where this has been done over a number of years. Soil compaction could be a real issue in September-harvested fields, with heavy balers, loading shovels, bale trailers and possibly even trucks moving in all directions across the fields.



The decision to bale or chop straw should be based on economics.

Table 1: Value of straw chopped and returned to the soil.

Crop type	Crop yield (t/ha)	P kg/ha	K kg/ha	Value €/ha*
Spring barley	7.5	3	50	€55
Winter barley	10.0	4	51	€58
Winter wheat	11.0	4.4	56	€64
Winter oats	9.0	3.6	87	€91
OSR	5.0	2.4	27	€32

*Monetary value based on current market nutrient costs for P and K.
The table above does not include the cost of chopping or incorporation.

■ The post-harvest period is a good time to take soil samples, as land has not received chemical or organic fertilisation in over three months. Under current regulations, you cannot apply P to an arable soil without a valid soil sample (a sample that is <4 years old and represents no more than 5ha of land). This also applies to grassland soils where the grassland stocking rate exceeds 130kg organic N/ha. It is important that

you determine your grassland stocking rate and check that your soil samples are valid for this year. If not, sample as soon as you can. A soil sample taken and tested by September 14 is valid for 2024. Any soil reports expiring this year should be replaced by a sample taken after September 15 so that 2025 will be the first of the valid four years. Contact your advisor to assist you in calculating your grassland stocking rate.

Crops Forum 2024

The Teagasc Crops Forum takes place in the Keadeen Hotel, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, on Wednesday, September 11, at 2.00pm. As always, this is a very informative event, which gives growers and industry stakeholders an insight into current topics in the tillage industry.

Winter oilseed rape

The area harvested in 2024 was approximately 5,000ha lower than in 2023 due to the poor weather last August; however, with a more spread out harvest this year there could be more time to establish a crop for 2025. August-drilled crops are normally quicker to establish and usually perform better than September-drilled crops, although last year some crops were drilled around mid September and performed reasonably well.

Varieties

Choosing a variety can be tricky and is regularly dependent on what the local merchant has to offer. This year has made growers focus more on variety traits rather than just yield. Resistance to diseases like light leaf spot was very important in 2024 as opportunities to apply a fungicide were scarce, so choosing varieties with good resistance is a consideration. Another trait that will be important, given the new rules concerning the use of glyphosate, is pod shatter resistance; crops will have to be left to mature naturally in 2025 so having pods that don't shatter will be very important.

Seeding rate

Sow 60-80 seeds/m² to establish 30-50 plants/m² in the spring. Varietal differences



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in vigour and thousand seed weight, with seedbed conditions and sowing date, must be accounted for. Poor seedbed and late sowing will need higher (10%) seeding rates.

Weed control

A recent trend in weed control has been to leave it to Astrokerb to control everything in December/January, and while this will control a wide variety of weeds, including resistant blackgrass, it is a very risky strategy. Field history is important as pre-emerge weed control is still the most effective. Volunteer cereals, cleavers and grass weeds are the main competitive weeds and do the most damage early in the crop's growth. Apply pre-emergence or early post-emergence treatments. Options include Butisan S/Rapsan 500 (1.5L/ha) or Katamaran Turbo (2-2.5L/ha) within 48 hours after sowing. Graminicides such as Falcon, Fusilade, etc., can also be used to control grass weeds.