

TILLAGE

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Winter cereal crops

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Consider replanting carefully, as poorly established winter crops may still come good.

Do you re-drill poorly established crops or not? You need to decide soon. Any decision should be economic, but also consider seed availability, workload and crop rotation. Assess your crops and where there are viable plant counts, stick with them as they stand a good chance of giving decent yields.

Much to think about

Even where there are bare areas, you should consider the total area affected, soil conditions, reseeding cost, and workload through the season before re-planting. **Table 1** breaks down the costs of growing winter cereals versus re-sowing spring crops in the same fields. This accounts for



APPROXIMATELY

€250/ha

has already been spent in autumn growing winter cereal crops. When thinking about re-sowing spring crops, this needs to be taken into account.

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the approximately €250/ha already spent in autumn. The figures are based on the 2024 Teagasc Costs and Returns. They clearly show that the spring crops will cost about the same as their winter counterparts to grow, so a spring crop must yield similarly to a winter crop.

Viability

From **Table 1**, spring malting barley looks the most viable crop to re-drill provided you have a contract. The winter wheat planting window is closing fast. Plant any seed by mid February. Winter wheat seed sown in spring is classified as a spring wheat crop on the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) application for 2024. Where winter barley crops are thin, have your nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) fertiliser ready to apply by late February if conditions allow. There is no point in applying fertiliser if there is no growth or crops are waterlogged. Wheat or oat fertiliser applications can wait. Where winter barley has not received a



Grass weed control is unlikely in winter barley now.

herbicide, grass weed control will be difficult. Most crops have passed the final application date for winter herbicides that control grass weeds. The only options for these are spring herbicides, which work best in warm conditions. Where oilseed rape is due to follow winter barley, choose a herbicide that will not have a residual effect, especially if direct drilling, so read labels carefully. In wheat, there are options for grass weed control such as Alister Flex, Pacifica Plus, Broadway Star or Monolith. Chose which best suits you, as each product has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Table 1: Cost of re-sowing winter crops with spring cereals.

	Feed wheat		Feed barley		Malting barley*	Feed oats	
	Winter	Spring*	Winter	Spring*		Winter	Spring*
Total variable costs	1,711	1,678	1,629	1,567	1,554	1,365	1,555
Break even yield (t/ha)	8.1	8.0	8.1	7.8	5.8	7.2	8.2
Cost per tonne at target yields	155.5	186.4	162.9	195.9	207.1	151.6	194.4

*Cost of drilling winter cereal included.

Winter oilseed rape

Oilseed rape crops mostly look fine but February can be frustrating, as pigeons will continue to graze crops. All efforts to stop this should be deployed. Otherwise, they can cause a lot of damage. The effect of pigeon grazing will determine how much N is needed for the crop in the coming weeks.

The size of the canopy can be measured with the green area index (GAI) app on your iPhone. For Android smartphones you can use the BASF GAI website. Over the coming weeks, assess your canopy size before deciding on a fertiliser regime.

Table 2 shows the N requirement and strategies at different GAIs.

Sulphur and fungicide

Oilseed rape crops have a relatively high sulphur (S) requirement of 30-35kg/ha. Use fertilisers with relatively high levels of S in the first two splits if possible.

Few crops received a fungicide before winter, so it is highly likely that light leaf spot is present in most. Take leaves and



GAI 1.0.

put them in a plastic bag. Put the bag in a warm place, e.g., a hot press, for 24-48 hours. You should then see the little white salt-like lesions on the leaves. Where you see light leaf spot lesions use a fungicide containing prothioconazole (e.g., Proline), metconazole (Sirena) or tebuconazole (Fezan). Prothioconazole-based products will not have a growth regulator effect on the crop, whereas the other two actives will have some level of effect.

Table 2: N requirement for crops with different GAIs.

Crop GAI	Total N	Early split (late February or early March)	Main split (mid March)	Seed fill (late March/ early April)
2.0	130kg/ha	0	70kg/ha	60kg/ha
1.5	190kg/ha	40kg/ha (March)	90kg/ha	60kg/ha
1.0	210kg/ha	50kg/ha (March)	100kg/ha	60kg/ha
<1.0	225kg/ha	70kg/ha (February)	120kg/ha	35kg/ha

Note: Can add 30kg/ha for target yield of 5.0t/ha where farm fertiliser plans allow.

Beans

The Protein Payment Scheme 2024 is worth €7m. If a similar area of protein crops are planted this year, payment will be much lower than what was paid in 2023 (€584/ha). Beans are still a good economic alternative to spring cereals. **Table 3** shows the estimated gross margins of different crops. Only winter wheat performs better than beans at target yields.

Performance 2023

The performance of beans in 2023 was variable due to late drilling and some planting in unsuitable sites. Beans like moisture-retentive soils or soils that don't dry out during spring or summer. Drought-prone soils rarely perform well. In lighter soils, peas often perform better but harvest is risky.



Beans like moisture-retentive soils.

Beans perform well where the soil indices for P and K are high. Oak Park trials show where beans are sown in P and K index 1 or 2 soils, they never yield as well as those sown in index 3 soils.

Drill as early as conditions allow. However, soil conditions are as important as planting date, especially in a direct drill or min-till system. Drilling into wet soils can reduce root development and nutrient uptake. Aim to establish 30 plants/m². Try to complete drilling by early to mid March.

Table 3: 2024 Teagasc gross margin per ha at target yields (€/ha).

Crop	W. wheat	W. barley	S. barley	Malting	W. oats	WOSR	Beans	Peas
Gross margin at target yields	849	671	283	721	558	375	836	679

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