

TILLAGE

March 2024

Winter cereals

Making winter crops work

It may be more economic to manage a thin winter cereal crop with reduced inputs rather than replacing it with spring cereals. Use plant counts to determine management strategy for winter cereals.

Tailor inputs based on expected output. A winter wheat crop with a potential yield of 7.5t/ha will require a different approach to one with a potential yield of 10t/ha.



Use plant counts to assess winter crop viability.

Replanting considerations

When contemplating replanting a winter crop with spring barley, delay this decision until all other spring cereals have been planted. Winter wheat can produce a viable crop with 70-80 plants/m² once they are relatively evenly distributed. When managing a crop with suboptimal plant numbers, tailor costs to potential yield. Match fertiliser rates to offtakes. A 7.5t/ha winter wheat crop requires 50kg/ha less nitrogen (N) than a 10t/ha crop. For thin crops, front load the N programme. Apply 25-30kg when

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BEANS

AIM FOR A
TARGET PLANT
POPULATION OF

25-30

PLANTS/M².

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growth commences. Consider splitting applications early in the season as demand is low. An application of CCC during growth after an N application may help tiller survival but it is crucial to correct any nutrient deficiencies, particularly manganese. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) confirmed that bare areas within winter crops do not require resowing, making them eligible for the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) and Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM). However, if a field or significant portions of it have failed, they must either be resown or designated as fallow by creating a subdivision. Fallow land is ineligible for the SIM.

Winter barley

In 'normal' crops apply the first split of N (50kg/ha) in early March and the main split by GS31. On thin or backward crops, the first N can be earlier (start of growth) but application rate should be low as crop demand is small. Sulphur (S) (15kg/ha) and trace element deficiencies should be applied before GS31.

Use Moddus/Medax Max plus 1.0L/ha CCC for high-lodging-risk fields at GS30. For best straw-shortening effect in barley, apply Cerone/Terpal/Moddus/Medax Max from GS32-39.

It is too late to control annual meadow grass where crops did not receive a herbicide in autumn. Where a tidy up is required use a sulfonylurea/Zypar/Galaxy/Hurler, etc., depending on weeds. Active growth and high rates are needed for overwintered weeds.

Winter wheat

On thin crops, second wheat or where take-all is a risk, increase N rate for the first application to 75kg/ha. For crops with satisfactory plant counts apply 40-50kg/ha of N as the first split in mid March or by GS30. Generally, divide the N applications over three splits – one-quarter: half: one-quarter. Apply the main split by GS31 and the last by GS39. Where grass weeds are present Pacifica Plus/Monolith plus Biopower are options. Broadway Star plus Torpedo is a strong brome option where annual meadow grass has already been controlled. Avoid crops under stress and be careful of tank mixes.

Winter oilseed rape

There are big savings to be had in crops with large canopies. Avoid early application and high N rates in these crops. Excessive N will result in a reduction in yield. A green area index (GAI) <1.0 will require 225kg N/ha (first application as soon as growth commences), whereas a crop with a GAI of 2.0 will only need 130kg/ha for 4.5t/ha, and the first split can be delayed until mid March.



GAI of 2.0 requires 130kg N/ha.

Spring crops

Spring beans

Interest in spring beans is good due to the increased protein payment, favourable contract prices (€250), and a scarcity of spring seed. The protein payment rate will depend on the area planted but will be in the range of €350-€500/ha. Beans are more profitable than spring barley and also increase profitability across the rotation.

The yield potential of beans is reduced after mid-March sowing. Aim to plant them as early as possible in March but get your seedbed right. Target a plant population of 25-30 plants/m². Increase this target to 40 plants/m² for late sowing or on unproductive soils. A thousand grain weight (TGW) of 550g will need a sowing rate of 206kg/ha (13.1st/ac). Take note of the TGW on the bag as big seed requires high seed rates. It is essential that pre-emergence residual herbicides are used, as

Basagran is the only approved post-emergence herbicide which controls emerged broadleaved weeds and it has a very limited weed spectrum. Pre-emergence residual products work best on fine seedbeds with some moisture after spraying. Rolling post sowing helps the activity of pre-emergence herbicides by breaking up the clods. The main pre-emergence herbicide options are: Nirvana 4.0-4.5L/ha; Nirvana 2.5 plus Defy 4.0L/ha; Stallion 3.0L/ha; and, Chanon/Emerger 2.5 plus Defy 2.5L/ha.

Spring barley

Seed is in tight supply this season, so growers may not get their variety choice. Gather as much information as possible on the variety you are sowing. Agronomic ratings from other countries do not translate well to Ireland so be cautious, especially with straw strength. Reduce



Sow beans before cereals to maximise yield.



Knowledge of TGW is essential for correct establishment rate.

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total N on varieties where information on straw strength is scarce and avoid fields with recent applications of organic manure.

High plant counts significantly increase lodging risk. Determine the TGW of the seed before planting. Most seed bags

(native and imported) will have the TGW printed on the bag, so check before you sow.

The target for spring barley is to establish 300 plants/m². If standing ability is a concern reducing seed rate by 25-30kg/ha can reduce lodging risk.



Organise your workload

March brings an increase in workload on many farms. It is important to be as organised as possible. Keep equipment well maintained and stored safely so it can be easily found when needed. This will save time and make tasks easier.

Getting enough rest

Working long hours on field operations or getting up regularly at night to check on cows calving and ewes lambing can make it very challenging to get enough sleep. Sleep when you can. This might be any time of the day if you're not getting enough rest at night. Having adequate sleep is important as it improves alertness and helps prevent injuries and ill health. A good routine for meals will also improve alertness and help prevent snacking and a poor diet. Seek help and use contractors to maintain a sustainable workload.

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