

TILLAGE

February 2025

Winter oilseed rape

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Oilseed rape that has been grazed by pigeons.

Oilseed rape crops seem to have been heavily grazed by pigeons this year, more so than in the last couple of years. This has resulted in some crops, which had relatively good canopies before Christmas, looking quite poor now. As grazed crops will soon need their first application of fertiliser, all efforts to stop pigeons grazing in the coming weeks need to be deployed to stop further damage. Remember that nitrogen (N) is stored in the leaves of oilseed rape and when pigeons graze it, they are taking away that N, which will need to be replaced by chemical N, adding to the overall cost of growing the crop.



EXPECT AROUND

€580/ha

this year for the
Protein Payment.

The size of the canopy can be measured by using the green area index (GAI) app on your iPhone. For Android smartphones you can use the BASF GAI website. Where crops have a GAI of 1.0, you have approximately the equivalent of 50kg/ha of N already in the crop that is worth approximately €54/ha at the current N price of approximately €1.04 per kg. Over the coming weeks, assess your canopy size before deciding on a fertiliser regime for the crop. **Table 1** shows the N requirement and strategies at different GAIs.

Sulphur

Sulphur (S) is often forgotten where fertilising oilseed rape crops, even though the crop has a relatively high requirement of 30-35kg/ha. Use N fertilisers that have a relatively high level of S, e.g., ASN (if

available). Apply S in the first two splits if possible. Even though most crops received a fungicide in the autumn, depending on the varietal resistance to light leaf spot, some crops may need to be monitored to see if they require another fungicide application. Take samples of leaves and put them in a plastic bag and then put the bag in a warm room (e.g., a hot press) for 24-48 hours and you should then see the tell-tale signs of the little white salt-like lesions on the leaves. Where you see light leaf spot lesions use a fungicide containing prothioconazole (e.g., Proline) or tebuconazole (Fezan) for control. Note that prothioconazole-based products will not have a growth regulator effect on the crop, whereas tebuconazole will have some level of effect.

Table 1: N requirement for crops with different GAIs.

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

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

Beans

The Protein Payment Scheme 2024 had its budget of €7 million topped up, which meant that growers received a premium of approximately €480/ha. The increased premium seemed to encourage growers to continue planting into May. The budget will be €10 million this year, subject to a



Plant beans in February and March in good soil conditions.

maximum payment of approximately €580/ha. One lesson from last year was that late planting will result in late harvesting, with May-planted crops being harvested in November and December. Aim to plant beans in February and March in good soil conditions. There are four varieties recommended again this year: Caprice; Lynx; Protina; and, Victus. All have their own strengths and weaknesses, and different seed sizes. Look on each bag for its thousand seed weight (TGW) and calculate the correct seed rate accordingly. Aim to drill 40-45 seeds/m² to establish 35 plants/m². The performance of beans has been variable on many farms over

the last few years but some seem to get consistently good yields. Beans like moisture-retentive soils or soils that don't dry out during the spring or summer.

Soils that are drought prone rarely perform well unless we get a damp summer. In lighter soils, peas can often perform better but they are risky to harvest.

Beans perform well where the soil indices for phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are high. Trials from Oak Park have clearly shown where beans are sown in index 1 or 2 soils for P and K, they never yield as well as those sown in index 3 soils, regardless of how much fertiliser is used.

Winter cereal crops

Now is the time to assess your winter crops to see how they have emerged from a relatively mild winter. Many crops were well advanced coming towards the end of the year, especially those that were drilled early. Barley crops especially may start to turn yellow over the next few weeks as the demand for N increases. Over the last number of years there has been an increasing trend to apply the first N on barley earlier and earlier; however, trials from Oak Park still suggest that the first N applied in early March gives the best result in terms of yield. The trials have also shown that the penalty for applying N in late February is quite small, so if ground conditions are good and there is sufficient growth, then an application of 30kg N/ha may be justified to help tiller growth. For winter wheat and oats there is no need to apply N-based fertilisers in February. Wait



Barley turning yellow.

until growth starts in March. In wheat, there are still options for grass weed control such as Alister Flex, Pacifica Plus, Broadway Star or Monolith. Choose whichever option best suits your situation, as each product has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Winter oat crops for the most part have had no herbicides applied yet, so spring cereal herbicides will be the choice. Again, check labels for products that are approved for oats and use them when conditions are suitable.

Upcoming events

February is a busy month with many events around the country. Our series of spring seminars continues in various locations, while a number of crop

walks will also take place (Table 2), which will give advice on the different tasks that need to be completed on winter crops over the coming weeks.

Table 2: Teagasc tillage events in February.

Event	Location	Date	Time
Seminar	Teagasc Office, Dundalk, Co. Louth	February 6	7.30pm
Seminar	Tullamore Court Hotel, Co. Offaly	February 11	7.30pm
Crop walk	Oak Park, Co. Carlow	February 18	2.00pm
Crop walk	Wexford	TBC	
Crop walk	Cork	TBC	
Crop walk	North east	TBC	
Seminar	An Grianán Hotel, Burt, Co. Donegal	February 27	8.00pm

Teagasc tillage podcast

Don't forget that for all the latest tillage news the Teagasc tillage podcast is available on the Teagasc website, Apple Podcasts, Spotify or by scanning the QR code.



Slurry and calving/lambing safety

With slurry, evacuate all animals and ventilate before you agitate. Select a breezy day and open all doors and outlets to provide a draught. Keep people away from the shed and agitation point for at least 40 minutes after starting. Keep the tank opening secure. Beware of gas in buildings that are linked by tanks or drainage channels. Keep safe during calving and lambing. Use calving/lambing gates and pens. Keep a physical barrier between you and a calving cow at all times.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Take care when spreading slurry.



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