



DETERMINED OSR IMPROVEMENT ON THE WOLDS

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Attention to detail from well before the crop is planted through to the latest possible desiccation has seen the J.S. Scholes Partnership improve oilseed rape yields on the Yorkshire Wolds by fully a tonne per hectare over the past 10 years.

Across the 100-120 ha grown annually at Fimber Nab Farm near Driffield and on variety of local contracts, five year average yields are currently running at 4.25t/ha. What's more, manager Andy Murr and Rachel Scholes – who runs the 870 ha business with her mother, Maureen – have brought in over-the-weighbridge yields as high as 6.5t/ha from their silty loam with chalk ground.

“The consistent 4t/ha-plus we're now getting works for us,” says Rachel. “Wheat and potatoes are our main earners, but our break crops need to pay their way with the least possible risk. We've extended our rotation in recent years, adding vining peas and winter barley. Like the potatoes, we're now only growing oilseed rape every six or seven years. The advent of hybrid barley has made the crop economic here, giving us a better **OSR** entry than we ever had with wheat.

With a reliable contractor removing all the straw, we now have the flexibility to sow as early as the second week in August if conditions are right. Even where we incorporate around 6t/ha of chicken muck from a local broiler unit ahead of the rape, we generally have time for a stale seedbed ahead of sowing.”

While black-grass is not a problem on most of the Partnership's ground, pre-planting glyphosate ahead of the OSR is important in tackling the barley volunteers that are so competitive.

“Success with OSR is all about getting the crop away rapidly and reliably,” stresses Andy Murr. “This has become noticeably more challenging since the loss of neonics. As part of our recipe for the most consistent establishment, ensuring barley volunteers don't suck-up all the N and out-compete our rape is vital.”

Barley stubbles ahead of the OSR are typically worked to 5-6” with a Vaderstad TopDown to create enough loose soil for the best early taproot development. Then vigorous, fast -developing hybrids are sown at 45 seeds/m² with a standard coult Vaderstad Rapid as soon after the first week in August there is sufficient moisture.

“**DK Extrovert** has been central to our OSR progress,” Rachel explains. “We've grown it from the day the variety first became available and it has never let us down. We really appreciate its vigour in the spring as well as the autumn. “The 6.5t/ha we harvested in 2011 underlined its potential on our ground when the conditions are right. We try a new variety alongside it every year on a field scale and until the arrival of **DK Expedient** we couldn't find anything to match the Extrovert. We're growing 34 ha of the new variety this season and it's really impressing us with even its greater get-up-and-go.”

“We haven't seen any yield reduction following the loss of neonics,” adds Andy. “We routinely need two or three sprays to keep on top of the flea beetle though. And we've increased our seed rate from the 35 seeds/m² we used before. We used to sow in bands, but our trialling shows we get higher yields from conventional sowing here. Drilling with the Rapid into soil previously set up with the Topdown followed by a single rolling gives us a nice even sowing depth and first class seed-to-soil contact.

“It also means the best conditions for pre-em activity to tackle the cleavers, poppies and other broadleaved weeds that always seem to be a aproblem,” he points out. “We spray as soon as we can after rolling, including 30 kg/ha of liquid N in the tank wherever crops haven't had any chicken muck. We follow-up with a graminicide for the barley volunteers, then



go back in with a dose of prothioconazole in early November to tidy up any phoma and give a head start to our light leaf spot programme. We include extra trace elements – mainly boron – at this stage, together with Nutri-Phite PGA for a timely growth boost.”

Little and often feeding is the priority in the spring. While Andy and Rachel never want to starve their crops, they don't want to lose nutrients through their free-draining ground either. With an average pH of 8.0, they also need to guard against mineral lock-up.

They use an N Sensor to target their main two liquid applications carefully to crop need on the Absolute N regime, having applied a blanket first split of 40kg/ha of nitrogen balanced with sulphur as soon as spring temperatures begin to build.

With little local threat from light leaf spot and a specialist PGR only used with 'monster crops', tebuconazole is generally employed to steady the crop at stem extension, with extra trace elements – especially boron – and Nutriphite PGA. A single flowering spray of boscalid is the norm with a close eye kept out for seed weevil in what is a local hotspot for the pest and a specialist pyrethroid included wherever any are detected.

“We hold off as late as we dare with our desiccation to give as much time for pod fill as we can, taking advantage of the extra insurance Dekalb pod shatter resistance gives us,” Rachel concludes. “It's another thing we've learnt through experience and all part of doing everything we can to allow the crop to fulfil the potential we know it has.”



