

Future growth for OSR - if establishment improves

Customer Insights

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Seed depth, moisture management and early nutrition are the key establishment factors for iOSR grower and meeting host, Ian Matts

Oilseed rape remains by far the favoured break crop by all the growers in the iOSR group. But, the exceptionally challenging establishment conditions in the autumn, and the ongoing threat of Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle in the remaining crop, has severely tested resolve this season. pletely, and other fields quickly decimated to unviable levels.

iOSR meeting host, Northamptonshire grower, Ian Matts of Brixworth Farming, experienced the worst combination of exceptionally hot, dry conditions on heavy soils and intensive pest pressure, which resulted in some OSR failing to emerge completely, and other fields quickly decimated to unviable levels.

This year, some 300 hectares of oilseed rape had been planned across the 2500 ha of arable cropping, however only 100 ha has made it through to the spring. "We're especially focussed on reducing the impact of black-grass throughout the rotation," he reported.

"So we have been particularly ruthless in the autumn in taking out OSR at low plant populations that could have allowed black-grass to proliferate."

Having opted for Clearfield varieties, in an effort to get on top of high volunteer numbers and brassica weeds, no pre-em herbicides had been used, which enabled some of the failed areas to be put back into a late sown winter oat crop. "It's not an ideal scenario, as we won't get the full benefit of a cereal

break that the OSR gives, but it is better than a fallow year and hopefully the oats at high seed rate will give some competition against the black-grass," he said.



Ian showed that whilst OSR produced the farm's lowest net margin in 2018, principally due to higher growing costs and lower yields, it has historically been one of the highest net margins over the last five seasons. It also has an important role in spreading workload and diversifying risk across the rotation.

"Establishment has to be the key to getting the crop up and away in the autumn," Ian believes.

"We are looking to focus more on uniformity of seed depth, moisture management - both to conserve soil moisture in a dry year but, more frequently, to move excess away from the seedling over the winter - and early nutrition."

Having experimented with a zero-till GD drill for the past two seasons, this year they are looking to invest in a Horsch Sprinter, following the success of the Horsch CO used this season.

It's a system that Cotswold iOSR grower, Hamish Campbell, reported has been a 'revelation' for OSR establishment; the combination of leg opening up of channels for the OSR root, putting DAP down the spout to feed the seed, and then a press to conserve moisture had proven reliably effective for them.

If more consistent establishment can be achieved, and a solution found to cope better with CSFB pressure, there's significant scope for the OSR area to be restored and remain the key break crop for growers.



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