FAQs for late drilled wheat

Agronomy Issues
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Syngenta are receiving queries on managing late drilled wheat as a result of the very wet season. We are addressing the most frequently asked questions below.

What is the optimal drilling timing for winter wheat?

If looking at it purely from a yield potential perspective, earlier drilled crops have more time to put resource into maximising yield. However, depending on the farm situation, greater return on investment may be achieved from later drilled crops with opportunity to better control grassweeds, reduce overwinter inoculum in the crops and reduce risk of BYDV.

How late can winter wheat be drilled?

Winter wheat requires a vernalisation period which means there are latest safe sowing dates and this is variety specific. GLEAM, for example, has a shorter vernalisation period than many other commercial varieties which means it has a latest safe sowing date of mid-February. Be aware that late drilled crops are likely to have lower yield potential.

Do I need to increase my seed rates?

Increasing seed rates is a useful option for increasing establishment and mitigating for lost tillering capacity. However, seedbed quality is still critically important: poor seedbed quality will still have a detrimental impact on establishment at elevated planting density. If drilling late, January onwards, we would recommend a rate of up to 500 seeds/m2.

Does drilling winter wheat late bring any benefits?

Later drilled crops give the opportunity for better grassweed management and help with avoiding aphid flights to minimise the risk of BYDV. Additionally, later drilled crops are likely to have less over-wintered innoculum, as well as a less dense canopy which may reduce disease pressure. Many varieties can deliver high yields in a late drilled scenario, however growers should balance these benefits against the risks of poorer establishment, reduced yield and weaker rooting. The Recommended List provides some data on variety performance in late drilled trials.

Do I need to adjust my spring agronomy for late-drilled crops?

Yes**.** Growers and agronomists will need to focus on the agronomy of late-drilled crops to maximise yield and quality. Crops drilled very late into wet soils and at high seed rates are likely to be poorly rooted and competition within the crop may result in taller plots. PGRs should be used to manage risk accordingly. Experience has shown that late drilled crops which have not tillered well are likely to respond positively to early nitrogen to increase yield potential.

Is spring cropping a better option?

Some varieties are now past their latest safe sowing date and should not be sown. Growers should make a judgement call based on local conditions including soil type, seedbed quality and weather. Combining this with previous experience and local practice is also important. Spring cropping may be a better alternative where conditions are poor.

I was unable to drill all of my winter wheat – how should I store the unused seeds?

Handle bags of treated seed carefully and store them in a secure place. Store all unused seeds in good conditions (i.e. dry, cool and pest-free).