

New spring barley developments poised to help Scottish growers from this season

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Covid-19 may have affected whisky consumption, but the 2020 harvest confirmed that Scottish growers can produce top-level spring malting barley, and new developments available for the crop from 2021 are poised to help this continue.

Those were the messages from a recent Scottish malting barley conference, organised online by Syngenta.

With full approval for malt distilling and brewing on the Malting Barley Committee (MBC) approved list, Laureate dominates spring barley varieties, said Bob King, commercial director at Crisp Malt. The company has Scottish malting plants in Banffshire and at Alloa, and Mr King said Laureate finds favour with all malt distillers.

Key to Laureate's success is its consistent performance over different seasons," added Syngenta seeds marketing manager, Tracy Creasy. "However, the days of a single variety filling all the spring barley area have gone. End users and growers need to spread risk. Therefore, new for 2021, we are launching SY Tungsten - a strong partner variety to Laureate for the future.

Currently possessing provisional approval 1 for malt distilling and brewing on the MBC list for harvest 2021, Syngenta is hopeful SY Tungsten will progress to full approval in the summer, explained Syngenta technical manager, Kathryn Hamlen. "Fresh out of the box, SY Tungsten looks well-suited to Scotland," she said.

"At 103% of control varieties, SY Tungsten has a high Northern yield on the AHDB Recommended List and, importantly, it maintains the same maturity as Laureate.

"Quality-wise, it also combines a high hot water extract, important for end users, with a low grain nitrogen content, which makes it easier for growers to achieve malt distilling specification. Scottish trials showed about 125 kg/ha was the optimum nitrogen fertiliser dose. It also has good grain size yet has shown less grain skinning in trials than a number of other varieties. For spring 2021, perhaps grow Laureate as your main variety but try some SY Tungsten alongside it," Mrs Hamlen added.

With the importance of good crop establishment for spring barley, Syngenta field technical manager, Dr Jonathan Ronksley, said controlling diseases that threaten establishment remains crucial. Consequently, for 2021 Syngenta is launching its advanced fungicide seed treatment, Vibrance Duo, into spring barley, he said.

"This follows recent acceptance of Vibrance Duo for use on malting crops by the British Beer and Pub Association and Campden BRI," explained Dr Ronksley. "Importantly, however, Vibrance Duo does more than just improve crop establishment: trials show it also improves root growth and yield.

"An ADAS split field trial in Fife last year, for instance, showed a 71% increase in Laureate root weight from a Vibrance Duo seed treatment compared with a standard seed dressing. Another ADAS trial in Clackmannanshire showed a 134% increase in root weight. There were also an average of 416 plants per metre squared and 4.1 tillers per plant. That compared with just 347 plants per metre squared and 3.3 tillers per plant where the standard triazole seed treatment was used.

Overall, across 11 Laureate spring malting barley trial sites around the UK last season we saw an average yield increase of 0.18 t/ha from the Vibrance Duo seed treatment compared with the triazole standard. In general, I feel the biggest benefits come in more challenging growing situations, where the new treatment helps to build more resilient crops.

Dr Ronksley said Syngenta recommends that Vibrance Duo is co-applied with a loose smut-active seed treatment in barley. Vibrance Duo cannot be used on barley seed crops grown for certified seed production, he noted.

Tags:

Spring barley

Seed treatment