

TOPICS DISCUSSED AND DECISIONS MADE BY THE AHDB RECOMMENDED LIST PROJECT BOARD 25th June 2025

Board members present:

Peter Gregory (Chair)
Greg Dawson (Chair of Oilseeds Crop Committee)
Marion Self (Chair of Barley, Oats and other Cereals Crop Committee)
Patrick Stephenson (Chair of Wheat Crop Committee)
Chris Piggott (AIC)
Gabriella Everett (BSPB)
Jenna Watts (AHDB)
Russ McKenzie (AHDB)
Mark Ineson (MAGB)
George Goodwin (BSPB)
Lisa Black (Independent)
Steph Spiers (BSPB)

Apologies: Alistair Gale (UKFM), Richard Summers (BSPB)

Key items discussed:

1) Improved communications

- Ways to improve communication about the RL were discussed. The Chair had spoken with a number of individuals who felt the RL was being undersold.
- It was noted that under the terms of the consortium agreement it is the responsibility of AHDB to market the RL, not that of the Board.

2) Reports from the crop committees

- All three crop committees had lengthy discussions at their planning meetings on how to reduce trial costs for harvest 2026 and had selected trials with low success rates over recent years to stop.
- The Oilseeds Committee discussed ending the spring oilseed rape descriptive list but felt this might threaten the future of the spring crop in the UK.
- All three committees discussed proposals to change the statistical method for calculating yields. They expressed reservations regarding their ability to judge complex statistical arguments and sought additional guidance from statisticians.
- All three committees made adjustments to the criteria for variety selection, increasing the importance of some diseases reflecting growing farmer importance placed on disease resistance of varieties. The wheat committee increased the importance of some grain quality traits for milling varieties.

3) Trial design

- The Board received a presentation from David Leaper of Agrii (a member of the Oilseeds Crop Committee) proposing reducing the number of untreated replicates in trials from 3 to 1 to allow more sites to have untreated trials, while reducing costs.
- The Board discussed how farmers use the untreated data and the statistical validity of the proposed approach.
- It was agreed that statistical guidance was required before a decision could be made.

4) Budget for harvest 2026

- The Board noted that savings resulting from changes to the testing of wheat varieties for export branding are uncertain at this stage.
- The value of fusarium ratings in winter wheat was discussed. The trials are expensive and there is little differentiation between varieties. The millers have expressed concern that stopping testing would allow very susceptible varieties through the system with potentially serious impacts.
- The potential for switching from measuring fusarium symptoms to measuring mycotoxins was discussed.
- The Board approved the suspension for one year of the trials agreed by the crop committees in their deliberations

5) AHDB review of the RL

- Sarah Woolford, AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds sector director, presented the findings and recommendations of an internal AHDB review of the RL aimed to ensure the RL remains relevant and effective, considering budgetary constraints. The Board discussed the recommendations.
- The recommendation to stop all testing for winter rye, triticale, spring oilseed rape and spring linseed was met with some opposition. For rye in particular it was felt that important information on disease resistance was provided by the DL.
- The number and location of trials was discussed, with concerns expressed that reducing trial number would reduce precision. The importance of selecting the right locations and trial contractors was emphasised to ensure successful, relevant trials. However, it was noted that there were often limited options for trial operators in many parts of the country and trials in some regions would always be higher risk due to climate, but farmers in those regions want local data.
- The proposal to limit the number of varieties on the RLs was rejected. The Board felt this would stifle innovation and could lead to breeders disengaging with the RL, reducing its relevance. However, there was support for removing varieties from the lists sooner.
- The threats and opportunities presented to the RL by precision breeding was discussed.
- The Board emphasised the need to ensure the RL remains relevant and valuable for breeders and end users.