

Chelmsford Monitor Farm meeting report

Meeting 5: Profitable break crops

Speakers: Andrew Fairs (Fairking Ltd), Mark Bowsher-Gibbs (Sittingbourne Monitor Farm)

Date: 9 February 2018

Location: Galleywood Heritage Centre, Chelmsford CM2 8TR

For more information, visit: cereals.ahdb.org.uk/chelmsford



Meeting summary – key messages

- Key break crop considerations include: market, rotation, hidden costs, customer and you
- Don't look at one year's profitability, consider the whole rotation
- Growing niche crops is a next level of investment in time and money – attention to detail required

Break crop considerations

- Consider your market – mainstream or niche?
- Think about what your consumer wants/needs
- Consider future requirements: government policy, price, world competition
- Assess crops not just for their individual profitability, but across the whole rotation
- Think about the hidden costs behind gross margins, eg machinery requirements, impacts on the following crop
- Consider your agronomists knowledge on the crop that you are planning on growing
- Consider pesticide availability and Extension of authorisation for minor uses (EAMU)
- Is the equipment that you need available and within budget?
- Can you dry the crop and store it effectively?
- Attention to detail is critical
- What would you like to get from your break crop? How involved would you like to be?

Think about specific crop needs when considering a new break crop – machinery requirements, storage and agronomy



Break crop options

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Soya |  | Drilled early May (don't drill too deep, fixed hypocotyl length), use inoculated seed, pests can include delia bean fly, pigeons, can be difficult to grow if history of sclerotinia on-farm, requires late sunshine before harvest. |
| Millet |  | Late drilling date helps with grassweed control, fast growth, consider slug control, easy to combine. |
| Borage |  | Spring crop, oilseed, late April drilled, rapid growing, can suffer from mildew and sclerotinia, swathed and left in swath for 10-14 days, aiming for a bushy plant, specific customer requirement, eg. GLA levels, little requirement for more growers in the market. |
| Echium |  | Doesn't drop seed as much as borage, aim to include hives to encourage pollinators. |
| Quinoa |  | Gluten free and contains 9 amino acids, drilled in March, grown in wide rows to keep it clean, often last crop to be harvested on-farm, need for specialist equipment: drill, inter-row hoe, swather, pick-up header, dryer, traceable storage. |
| Chia seeds |  | Spring sown, use of inter-row hoe, harvest is in third week of September |
| Naked barley |  | More simple to grow, small market, increasing interest in ancient grains. |
| Other break crop options considered at the meeting: OSR, spring beans, spring oats, spring barley, naked spelt, evening primrose, coriander | | |

Projected 2018 gross margins

- Gross margins are not specific to any one enterprise and should be used to give an indication of national cropping trends
- Group 3 premium at time of calculation results in strong gross margin
- Best spring margin for malting barley
- Lowest gross margin for spring feed barley – however, due to the increasing amount of spring barley in the rotation, anything grown outside of a contract faces a risk of ending up in the feed market with no premium
- While spring gross margins provide lower gross margins, they can provide a good return on variable cost (investment)

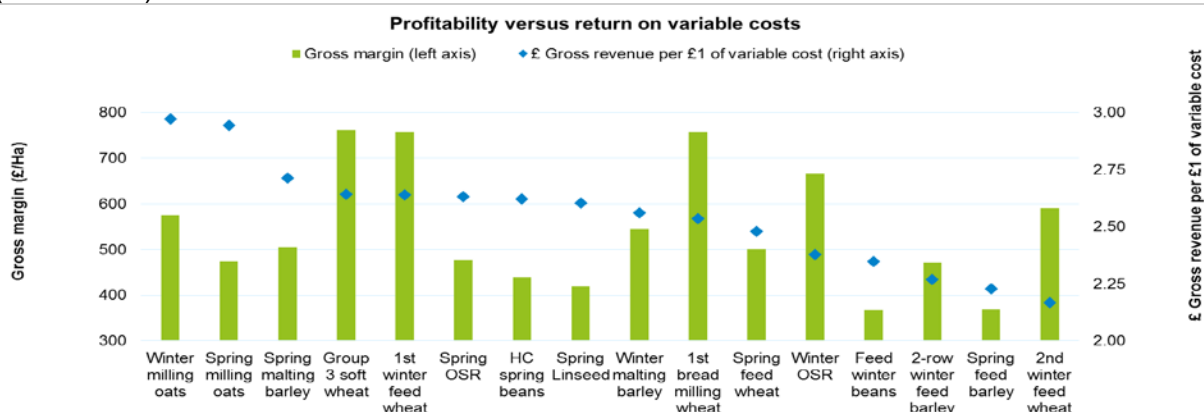
Projected 2018 gross margins

| | Nov-18 ex-farm price £/t | Yield t/ha | Gross Margin £/ha | Change on last year % | Gross Margin Rank 2018 | Gross Margin Rank 2017 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| First winter feed wheat | £135 | 9.0 | £757 | 14% | 2= | 2 |
| Second winter feed wheat | £135 | 8.1 | £590 | 16% | 5 | 6 |
| First bread milling wheat* | £145 | 8.6 | £757 | 7% | 2= | 1 |
| Group 3 soft wheat** | £142 | 8.6 | £762 | NEW | 1 | - |
| Two-row winter feed barley | £115 | 7.3 | £471 | NEW | 12 | - |
| Winter malting barley | £135 | 6.6 | £545 | 6% | 7 | 5 |
| Winter milling oats | £135 | 6.4 | £575 | 6% | 6 | 4 |
| Winter OSR^ | £320 | 3.6 | £667 | 1% | 4 | 3 |
| Feed winter beans | £160 | 4.0 | £367 | 5% | 16 | 11 |
| Spring feed wheat | £135 | 6.2 | £501 | NEW | 9 | - |
| Spring feed barley | £115 | 5.8 | £369 | 1% | 15 | 10 |
| Spring malting barley | £145 | 5.5 | £505 | 2% | 8 | 8 |
| Spring milling oats | £130 | 5.5 | £474 | NEW | 11 | - |
| Spring Linseed | £340 | 2.0 | £419 | NEW | 14 | - |
| Spring OSR^ | £320 | 2.4 | £477 | NEW | 10 | - |
| Human consumption spring beans | £182 | 3.9 | £439 | 9% | 13 | 9 |

All exclude straw, ^Including oil bonus

*Assuming £10/t milling premium **Assuming £7/t milling premium

Sources: The Agricultural Budgeting and Costing Book, Trade, AHDB



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Find out more – Links to AHDB information sheets or research

[Gross margin prospects for harvest 2018](#)

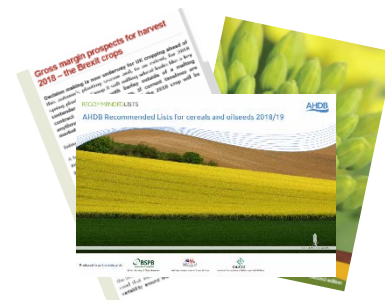
[Growing soya for the first time - Sittingbourne](#)

[AHDB Recommended Lists for cereals and oilseeds 2018/19](#)

[Oilseed rape guide](#)

[Machinery cost calculator](#)

For market information, visit cereals.ahdb.org.uk/markets



Next meeting

Date: 22 June 2018

Topic: Summer meeting

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