

TILLAGE

August 2023

Winter oilseed rape

Edited by
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The recently released Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) figures show the crops grown in Ireland this year, and make for some very interesting reading. The cereal area has fallen by 6% but when proteins and oilseeds are included, the decline in the tillage area is only 2%. This is largely down to the fact that the area of winter oilseed rape (WOSR) has increased significantly again for harvest this year to just over 20,000ha, up from 14,000ha in 2022. This is exactly double the area harvested in 2021 when just over 10,000ha were claimed.

At a time when tillage crops have been in decline, WOSR has become extremely popular with farmers for a number of reasons. It's not just the more reliable varieties that are now available, which help to improve the profit margins. The other benefits including spreading the workload, soil structure improvements and grass weed control have also helped to increase its



Clubroot has become an issue in some crops. popularity. Again in 2023, many growers were able to reduce the amount of nitrogen (N) required to grow the crop, by measuring the green area index (GAI) of the crop in early spring. This was a significant saving given the cost of fertilisers.

Early drilling is essential for growing oilseed rape. August-drilled crops generally perform better than September-drilled ones, and it may be easier to prevent pigeon grazing of large canopies, which in turn will reduce the amount of N needed. The

following tips are a useful guide when growing oilseed rape crops.

Sowing date: mid August to early September – ideally pre September 10; however, seedbed quality (i.e., fine and firm) is as important as sowing date.

Variety: the DAFM Recommended WOSR list is the best source of information on the main varieties. Conventional varieties or hybrids can be sown in August, but in September you should only use hybrids. Look for varieties with good traits such as light leaf spot (LLS) resistance and pod shatter resistance.

Seeding rate: sow 60-80 seeds/m² to establish 30-50 plants/m² in the spring. Varietal differences in vigour, thousand seed weight, along with seedbed conditions and sowing date must be accounted for. Poor seedbeds and later sowing will need higher (10%) seeding rates.

Weed control: field history is important as pre-emerge weed control is still the most effective. Volunteer cereals, cleavers and grass weeds are the main competitive weeds and do most damage early in the crop's growth. Apply pre-emergence or early post-emergence treatments. Options include Butisan S/Rapsan 500 (1.5L/ha)

or Katamaran Turbo (2.0-2.5L/ha) within 48 hours of sowing. Graminicides such as Falcon, Fusilade, etc., can also be used to control grass weeds, while Astrokerb will give control of broadleaf and grass weeds later in the season.

Clearfield varieties offer an opportunity to grow oilseed rape in fields where brassica weeds such as charlock, hedge mustard, etc., are a problem. The herbicide Cleranda is specially developed for Clearfield varieties and not only does it control charlock, it also controls groundsel, fumitory, poppy and speedwells. However, Cleranda can only be used on Clearfield hybrid varieties.

One area of concern that has appeared in some crops over the last two years is clubroot. There have been a number of reports of the disease in crops around the country. This can usually be traced back to poor rotation or the intensive use of brassica cover crops in schemes such as the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS). Clubroot is a soilborne disease that lives on hosts such as volunteer rape plants, brassica weeds, or weeds such as shepherd's purse. To avoid the problem keep rotations as wide as possible and avoid the use of brassica catch crops.

Catch crops

Anyone who is growing catch crops this year, especially if they are in the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), should sit down and have a good read through the new Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 6 rules and the Scheme

regulations before they drill any crops. There are quite a few changes from last year. **Table 1** shows the seed rates that are acceptable for ACRES. Note that there are some small changes to certain species from the old GLAS scheme.

Table 1: Seed rates for catch/cover crops in ACRES.

Catch crop species	Catch crop species Seed rate	Catch crop species	Seed rate (kg/ha)
Buckwheat	30-40	Rye	60-75
Crimson clover	10-15	Tillage radish	4-6
Berseem clover	10-15	Vetch	15
Forage/fodder rape	4-5	Leafy turnip	4-6
Mustard	8-10	Peas	40-50
Oats	60-75	Beans	70-90
Black oats	30-40	Linseed	15
Phacelia	4-5	Red clover	8-10
Sunflower	10-15		

ACRES scheme rules:

1. Crops must be sown by September 15.
2. Ploughing is not allowed.
3. At least two species must be selected from **Table 1**.
4. Undersowing with grass or cereals is not allowed.
5. Catch crop must remain in situ until at least January 1.
6. Incorporation or light grazing allowed after January 1.
7. Zero grazing and intensive strip grazing are not allowed.

As part of new conditionality rules in the BISS, GAEC 6 relates to the prevention of poaching and surface run-off into watercourses. These rules are relevant to fields where catch crops are planned and must be adhered to, even if you

are not in the ACRES scheme.

Some of the key rules are as follows:

1. There must be lie back area of grassland for the animals to access. This area must be at least equal to the area sown in catch crops that is being grazed, e.g., 10ha of catch crops must have 10ha of grassland lie back.
2. The lie back area must be accessible at all times.
3. A 3m buffer must be left around the catch crop from non-watercourse field boundaries.
4. A 4m buffer must be left from all watercourses.
5. Cannot remove soil cover before December 1 using a non-selective herbicide.
6. Back fencing can be used to reduce poaching.

For more details contact your Teagasc Advisor.

Post-harvest stubble management

Whether or not you agree with the Nitrates Directive regulations, stubble cultivations should still be seen as a very useful integrated pest management (IPM) tool to control weeds. There has been a significant increase in the cases of problem grass weeds like bromes, wild oats and blackgrass being reported to Teagasc advisors again in 2023. Stubble cultivations are the first step in the control of many grass weeds as the reliance on herbicides is not achieving adequate control on many farms.

As part of the IPMworks project, we visited Denmark in June, where Italian ryegrass has become a bigger problem than blackgrass on many farms. Where the problem is bad, growers are spending up to €150 per acre on various herbicides trying to control grass weeds, on top of all the IPM measures available. Herbicide resistance is widespread, as Italian ryegrass has the ability to develop resistance even faster than blackgrass.

We have already received samples into Oak Park of both Italian ryegrass and blackgrass from



Herbicide-resistant Italian ryegrass in winter wheat.

growers in Ireland, which are resistant to many of the common herbicides. In Denmark, a full IPM approach including crop rotation, roguing, stubble cultivations, machinery hygiene, herbicides and possibly grass ley are being considered to eliminate the problem, as using herbicides alone was not the answer. Shallow cultivations, no deeper than 2cm, will encourage up to 80-90% of sterile brome and blackgrass seeds to germinate. Be careful not to cultivate too deeply as this can induce dormancy in some weed seeds and delay germination until next season.

National Crops Forum

The annual National Crops Forum webinar provides an ideal opportunity for farmers to assess the season just gone and also look forward to options for next season. As well as the looking forward to the 2024 season, the

forum will look at the long-term future of the tillage sector.

Date: Friday September 8, 2023

Time: 2.00pm

Location: Killashee House Hotel, Naas, Co. Kildare