

BOUYANT MARKET

requires agronomy

BEST PRACTICE

50kgs of N, and the remaining nitrogen and sulphur (80-90kg SO₃) should be applied as a split starting at 15cm of stem extension and completed by late green bud or as late as can be spread.

“Growers will need to be patient about drilling. The first fortnight in April is ideal for spring rape, any earlier and colder soils will prevent it getting away quickly and the crop will be susceptible to flea beetle.”

Getting oilseed rape crops back on track this spring will take some careful agronomy, but at £350/t for harvest 2013 it's certainly worth the investment.

Building crop canopy will be key for most winter crops this season and getting architecture right for maximum output. Growers should aim for a Green Area Index (GAI) of 3.5 at mid flowering to produce the optimum 7000-8000 pods/sqm to stand a chance of achieving 5.0t/ha, says Richard Elsdon of United Oilseeds.

With GAI's as low as 0.5 in backward crops and little soil nitrogen likely to be available, crops will need 20kgN/ha to get them growing and build GAI. “For each GAI the plant has to accumulate

“Crop expectation will evolve as the crop grows, but those with extra potential need an additional 30kgN/ha for each 0.5t over 3.5t/ha and this should go on at yellow bud to early flowering.” But Mr Elsdon reminds growers to factor in the 60% efficiency of bagged nitrogen when calculating total amounts.

Only more forward crops in AICC agronomist Steve Cook's area will get a PGR fungicide this season to reduce height and encourage branching. He believes one application of Folicur (tebuconazole) at 0.75-1.0 L/ha is the best option if also hoping to catch some late light leaf spot control, but accepts that this may not be appropriate in more northern regions or in smaller crops.

Depending on the season and disease pressure, up to 0.5t/ha can be achieved from late season fungicides. And with thinner crops likely to have a protracted flowering period a two spray

approach this season is likely for *Sclerotinia* and *Alternaria* control, with each application giving three weeks protection, according to Mr Cook.

“Prothioconazole seems to be the most effective product, with tebuconazole having some effect as well.” Mr Cook's programmes will be centred around at least half rate of Proline²⁷⁵ (prothioconazole) for a single application and used in sequence with tebuconazole and carbendazim where two sprays are needed,” he notes.

Mr Elsdon's emphasises that whilst prothioconazole is a preferred product due to efficacy, it also offers a cost effective treatment over alternatives.

Be patient with spring rape

Management of spring rape will have to be spot on for growers to achieve top yields says Mr Elsdon. “Most of the management hinges around establishment with the quality of the seedbed having overriding importance.”

Growers will need to be patient about drilling. The first fortnight in April is ideal for spring rape, any earlier and colder soils will prevent it getting away quickly and the crop will be susceptible to flea beetle. Seed rates should reflect the lack of branching ability in the crop and a need to compete with weeds, he says.

Mr Elsdon advises 120-140kgN/ha to push the crop, half in the seedbed and the remainder at 2-3 leaf and reminds growers not to overlook sulphur.

Pollen beetle control is essential and will require vigilance and preparation to spray up to three times from the fully expanded rosette stage when flower buds form,” he concludes.