

# Plan carefully to get back on track this autumn

Soils, cropping plans, weed control programmes, and yield prospects have all taken a battering on many farms during the washout 2023/24 season, and careful planning is needed to get back on track for the coming autumn. Hutchinsons Technical Manager, **Dick Neale**, and Regional Technical Support Manager, **Alice Cannon**, offer their advice.



**Dick Neale** (Hutchinsons Technical Manager)

**From flood-damaged fields and deep ruts, to missed herbicide applications and last-minute cropping changes, few farms have escaped the impacts of an exceptionally wet season.**

Inevitably, there will be eagerness to get on with a new cropping year, but to do so requires careful planning to avoid any lasting legacy.

## Focus on soils first

The starting point is to use the spade to examine soil conditions in individual fields. This allows you to identify any issues, and plan remedial measures, either before or after harvest.

There is no one answer for every field, as soil texture, cropping, drainage, cultivations, and many other factors all come into play.

Often in years like this, deep subsoiling is a go-to option, especially where field operations in wet conditions have left an obvious mark. While this may be appropriate in some situations, it is wrong to treat all soils the same.

Tramline ruts may well be compacted to depth, but if they are to remain tramlines next season, there is little urgency to rectify the issues, although deep ruts may need levelling with a cultivator.

The key is to identify exactly what issues need fixing and make plans from there. For example, is there compaction? How deep is it? Are there other drainage issues?

In many cases, field digs this season have shown that where soils have been flooded or waterlogged, depth of compaction can be quite shallow (e.g. 10-15cm), as the weight of water compressed the ground.

Farms that have moved from full inversion tillage to min-till systems may also find the zone most vulnerable to compaction has moved closer to the surface, away from the traditional 'plough pan' nearer 30cm deep.

Going in with a subsoiler at 30cm when compaction is only 10cm deep will not fix the problem and simply wastes time, fuel and money.

For subsoiling to work, it must be at the correct working depth, so accurate machine setup and operation is essential. The point of the subsoiler wing should be just below the compaction zone, so compacted soil is physically lifted up and over the wing of the subsoiler foot, shattering in the process.

## Tackling poor drainage

This season has clearly highlighted fields with underlying drainage issues, so now is a good opportunity to examine affected areas and plan actions to 'future-proof' that land.

In some cases, new field drains may be needed, but given the high capital cost, and limited number of already busy contractors, that may not be possible this season.



In some cases, new field drains may be needed



**Alice Cannon** (Agronomist & Regional Technical Support Manager)

➤ Mole ploughing could be an alternative, which done properly, can make a real difference to fields with poor drainage. Soil needs to be moist, and have a minimum clay content of 30% to hold the shape of the mole.

Moling must be planned carefully to identify where it will and won't work, otherwise it risks moving water from one part of a field to another. Pay particular attention to slope angles, existing drains, and variations in soil texture across fields, which all influence effectiveness. Moling from a clay subsoil into a seam of sand, for example, may result in the sandy area becoming saturated and quickly losing structure, while going into a gravel area could actually help take water away.

Because of the need for damp soil, moling can start earlier in the season on uncropped land, unlike subsoiling which needs dry subsoil to shatter compacted layers.

It is usually done at 2-metre mole centres, at around 60 cm deep, which itself will do much to lift and shatter soil, reducing the need for additional subsoiling.

### Place for ploughing?

Although recent years have seen a significant move away from conventional ploughing, it could help alleviate shallower compaction, while also aerating soils.

It must be done well though, to the correct depth, and with full inversion. Extra care is needed on heavier soils, where drainage may be poor, as it can be more challenging to create a seedbed, particularly if land is ploughed wet and bakes dry - potentially doing more harm than good.

### Consider summer covers

Late June into July is a good time to establish summer cover crops on uncropped areas, given sufficient moisture.

Cover crops are an excellent way of addressing structural issues, aerating

soil, getting biology functioning, encouraging nutrient cycling, and recovering land for drilling.

Most cover crop species thrive in warm conditions, and by sowing slightly later, there is less risk of biomass becoming overly large and requiring additional management. Some topping may be needed in August/early September to prevent seed return though.

Tailor mixes to what you want that cover to achieve, and the soil and residue conditions it will present to the drill when establishing the following crop.

Resist temptation to simply go for the cheapest options like straight mustard or oats, as both have a high C:N ratio, which could lock-up nitrogen for following crops. Mustard alone does little to stabilise the soil or return nutrients, and could exacerbate already high slug risk. You may save £20/ha on the cover but could spend £20-30/ha chasing slugs afterwards.

Any cover crop can increase slug risk, especially in a prolific year like 2024, ➤

## Key messages

- Use the spade to assess soil conditions field-by-field
- Select remedial cultivations carefully and set machines up properly
- Consider summer cover to improve structure and kick-start soil biology, nutrient cycling, etc
- Identify grassweed threats and manage appropriately
- Consider catch/companion/cover crops to break cereal-dominated rotations

but picking species mixes carefully makes that risk more manageable (e.g. avoid brassicas and cereals). A good seedbed also helps, but as always, monitor risks and treat as necessary when thresholds are reached.

### Tackle grassweeds

Grassweeds are another big consideration this autumn, particularly where growers plan to drill early, possibly with a second, or third-year cereal. Additionally, control on some farms has been compromised by the weather, leading to higher seed return.

If planning to drill early, be sensible and consider black-grass and other grassweed risks.

At our Cambourne black-grass site and elsewhere, we are seeing black-grass dynamics changing towards slightly later germination in autumn and spring - not surprising as the weed adapts to concerted efforts over recent years to tackle late September/early October populations.

If black-grass is not germinating in September and early October, drilling earlier should allow a more vigorous wheat crop to be established ahead of it, but this must be supported with a sequence of well-timed residual herbicides to control late-emerging populations.

Some products must be applied pre-emergence of crops (e.g. tri-alleate), which offers a good starting point, but follow this with strong residual chemistry in mid-October, post-emergence of the crop, but still pre-emergence of black-grass, and plan for another application pre-Christmas or in spring.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and consider other grassweeds too; take time to understand the problems and use this information when planning cultivations, cropping, drilling dates, etc. Brome for example needs managing differently depending on whether it is soft/meadow brome or sterile brome.

### Early OSR caution

Finally, for those looking to drill oilseed rape early to beat cabbage stem flea beetle, experience suggests little benefit in going earlier than the last week in July.

Given sufficient soil moisture and a good seedbed, this is plenty early enough to get crops away ahead of CSFB, and any earlier could backfire if crops become too large, potentially harbouring more larvae in the spring, while also being harder to manage and at greater risk of disease, and pests such as mealy cabbage aphid. Indeed, anyone sowing early should select a Turnip Yellow Virus-resistant variety.

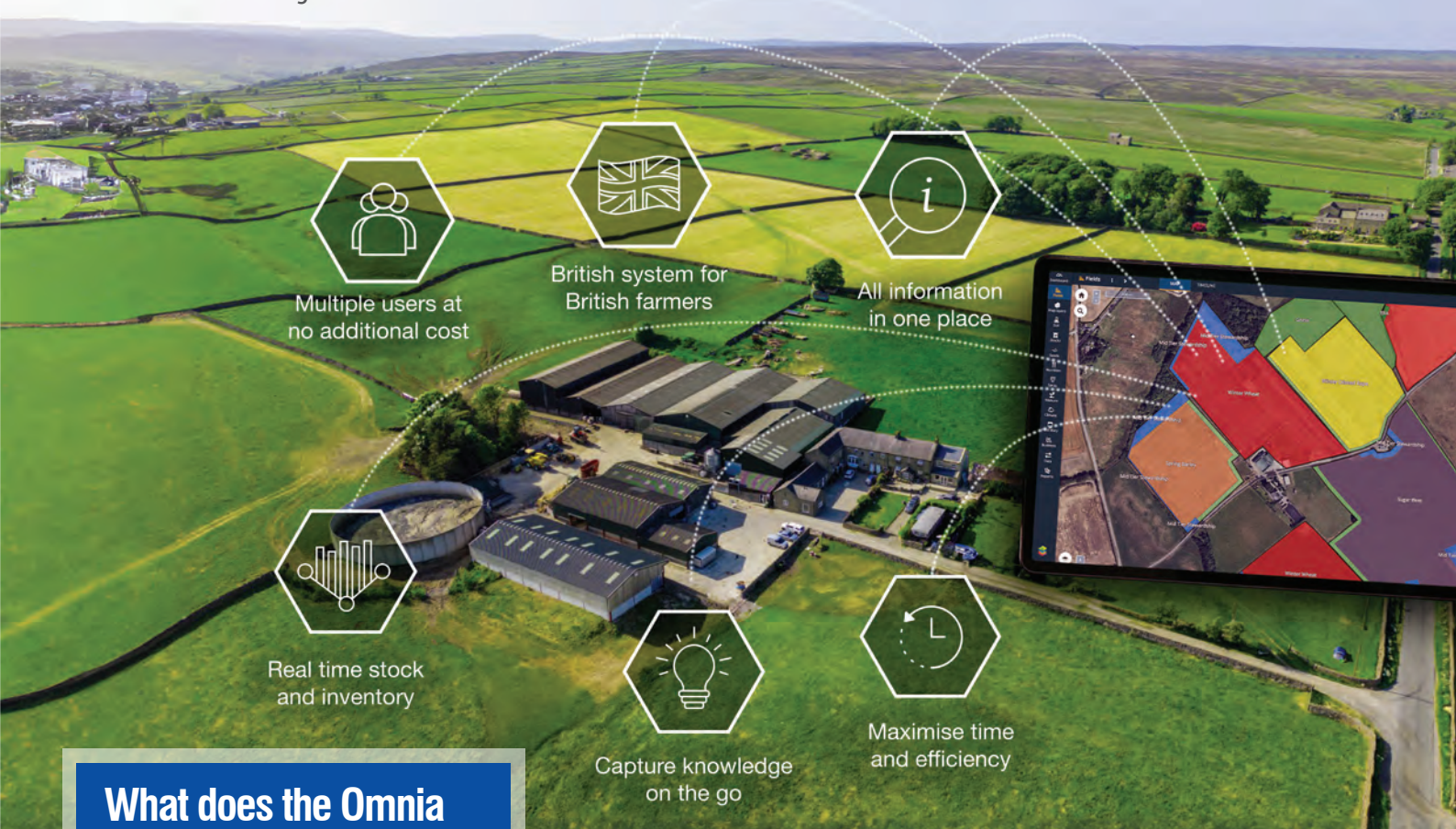
As always, tailor seed rates to variety, drilling date, and soil conditions.

**If you have questions about this article, please contact us:**  
[information@hlhlt.co.uk](mailto:information@hlhlt.co.uk)

# Omnia EasyPlan update explained



How the latest Omnia upgrade offers a next-generation digital farm management system, connecting telemetry, precision agriculture, decision support and a full suite of farm management modules.



## What does the Omnia EasyPlan upgrade offer?

- **Audited Crop Protection Plans**  
Allows users to create spray recommendation plans, audited by Hutchinsons HALO database to ensure compliance with statutory requirements
- **Stock Management**  
A real-time stock management system, which automatically updates for Hutchinsons customers but purchases can also be manually inputted from any supplier
- **Field Diary**  
Offers new functionality to digitally plan and record all live field operations

## Views from the field

Two focus groups, comprised of farmers, agronomists, and spray operators, were created to make sure the wants and needs of the people using Omnia would be met.

The involvement of 'boots on the ground' is crucial to make sure

the software delivers the desired capabilities and avoids the flaws in other systems they may have found, explains Hutchinsons Head of Omnia Oliver Wood.

Farmacy agronomist Toby Clack is a member of the agronomist focus group and he highlights the commitment of the Omnia team to continuous improvement, something he believes has been missing from the market-leading providers, Gatekeeper and Greenlight/Muddy Boots.

With both Gatekeeper and Greenlight now under one international's corporate roof, there's pessimism that advancing the systems for UK farmers will be a high priority. Currently, 70% of Toby's farms use Gatekeeper and the remaining 30% are on Greenlight but many of them also subscribe to Omnia for its precision farming capabilities. But running two systems has its drawbacks, he points out.

"It takes a lot of dedication to double enter data when running two systems, particularly when it's

not straightforward, such as when a variable rate has been applied using Omnia which then has to be averaged in another system because it can only handle flat rates."

The advantages of using just one digital system across the farm is evident for both farmers and agronomists, but what's the spray plan module like to use?

"When I first got involved with the project, I wondered whether the developers would be able to make the software work as we were suggesting, but the interface is really intuitive with very little by way of training needed."

Omnia's Head of Field-Based IT, Lewis McKerrow, says the user-friendly interface is something Omnia has built a reputation for and is really important. "That's been achieved in the Crop Protection Plan module by the provision of a split screen – on the left side is the data and, on the right, an interactive map which allows users to quickly identify fields or varieties, for instance." ➤

While the functionality of the module is similar to other spray recommendation software, the HALO pesticide database underpinning it is updated daily using core data from FERA. It also has 15 compliance checks, making it an exceptionally robust system.

## “The industry standard is for a weekly update to a pesticide database, but the Omnia system is always up to date”

We also have technical specialists combing the data so that it's enhanced, meaning unstructured data is manually labelled for the Omnia system to become structured data,” explains Lewis.

In practice that means that when incoming data from FERA isn't presented in a way that the software can interpret, it's rewritten in a way that it can. An example of unstructured data would be a phrase in instructions for use such as 'apply from the beginning of tillering (GS21)'. This can be enhanced and entered as structured data by entering as GS21 in the HALO database where the software will look for the earliest spray timing for a product.

At a press of a button, spray recommendations are audited, highlighting any compliance issues for the user to address before publishing the plan. There's also the option to print or email recommendations as a PDF, adds Oliver. “The company's research shows that just over 50% of spray operators still prefer to have a paper copy of a recommendation, although the trend is moving towards digital.”

**The module that perhaps brings the most revolution to Omnia business manager subscribers is its upgraded stock management, which brings real-time capability for the first time.** Although physical stocktakes will always be part of any digital system, agronomists will now be able to take a virtual look at spray stocks, as well as track and manage orders from any supplier with real-time status updates. For products coming directly from Hutchinsons, the updates will be automatic via its ERP system.

“If I'm making a recommendation in the field, it saves driving to the chemical store to check



Ben Jagger (Hutchinsons Agronomist)

stock levels and it also takes into account product that's in the shed but allocated to another spray recommendation, so I instantly know free stock levels,” says Toby.

In a season like this, when recommendations have changed several times, the new system has been worth its weight in gold, he adds.

The new updates to the Field Diary module that come with the EasyPlan upgrade, enables farms to log all applications in real-time. Previously records could be held in the Field Diary as historical notes, rather than as a live digital planner. East Yorkshire-based Hutchinsons agronomist Ben Jagger believes this added functionality brings benefits to both farmers and agronomists.

“As an agronomist, I'm able to log in to Field Diary and see when spray or nutrient recommendations have been applied or are planned to be applied as I'm walking crops. Although that saves a phone call, the idea isn't to take away communication. Instead, it creates a collaboration as both the agronomist and farmer have close involvement and will still discuss plans and outcomes.”

Ben uses Field Diary on a day-to-day basis to add notes as he's field walking. “I send monitoring notes with my recommendation to give a justification of inputs, which is very important.”

At the end of the day, having everything in one place makes compliance with Red Tractor and other assurance schemes much easier, he adds. “The stock management system helps with regulatory compliance as the actual contents of the store can be printed off at any moment in time and placed in the chemical store so it's available to the emergency services, if needed.”

The fact that the upgrade plugs the gaps in functionality in Omnia business manager at no extra cost is



Toby Clack (Farmacy Agronomist)

being met with real positivity from farmers, adds Ben. **“Omnia brings something new and meaningful to British farming and it's been developed from the ground up.”**

Although the new upgrade makes Omnia a complete crop management system, the work isn't stopping there. Ben's excited about some of the developments that will be following on from this most recent development. One of those will be in the stock management module, which users will be able to set up alerts for products with MAPP numbers that are soon to expire. Helping farms deal with Red Tractor compliance more easily is another key area of development for the Omnia team.

Oliver sums up succinctly by giving the commitment that Omnia development will never stop.

## Your data belongs to you

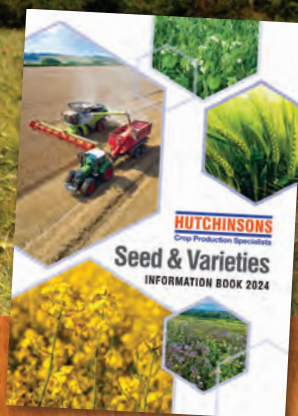
Omnia has a clear policy on data control, ownership and security – the farmer owns and has full control over who can access or view their data, including financial data.

In addition to Omnia's data policy and structured procedures, the company has now introduced external auditing through ISO27001 'Information Security Management' and Farm Data Principles to independently verify farm data is safe and Omnia is handling it in the way it promises to.

For more information about Omnia with EasyPlan upgrade, please visit our website [www.omniadigital.co.uk](http://www.omniadigital.co.uk) or email: [info@omniadigital.co.uk](mailto:info@omniadigital.co.uk)

# Autumn Cereal Options

**David Bouch** (Hutchinsons National Seeds Manager) highlights his wheat and barley recommendations for autumn drilling this year



Our new Seed & Varieties information book is available to download from our website [www.hutchinsons.co.uk/resources/seed-brochures](http://www.hutchinsons.co.uk/resources/seed-brochures)

Looking ahead to autumn 2024, new varieties of both wheat and barley are worth considering but with many sections the offer has not changed as dramatically this year. There are some outstanding new options that do need considering though.

## Winter barley

After the new genetics for BYDV tolerant hybrid barley in autumn of 2023. This season we will see for the first time BYDV resistant barley in the form of **SY Kestrel**. This will be extremely limited, with only a few hundred packs available, but offering greater options for BYDV management within the hybrid sector.

The Hyvido share of the feed barley market is likely to remain at similar levels this autumn, at circa 27%, although we will see a greater growth from 2-row barleys in the shape of both **LG Caravelle** and the newly recommended **LG Capitol**. **KW Tardis** will undoubtedly remain a popular choice, having taken the market by storm in autumn 2022 and following up with increased market share in autumn 23. KWS have their first hybrid barley in the guise of **KWS Inys**.

This has very high yield, stiff straw and very low brackling. Early maturity (-1) coupled with good untreated yield offers a different route to market for Hybrid Barley.

## Winter wheat

### GROUP 1 AND 2

**Crusoe** and **RGT Illustrious** (best untreated yield in the group 1 division) will be millers' preferred quality options as they were last year. Newly recommended **SY Cheer** whilst cleaner than the tried and tested has yet to have full approval as group 1 and will have further evaluation from this year's harvested crop. **Skyfall** and **Zyatt** still offer significant presence within the sector whilst requiring greater management particularly of Yellow Rust. **Skyfall** of course offers the greatest drilling window whilst still being the only variety in group 1 and 2 to offer OWBM resistance.

**KWS Extase** will remain the market leader in the group 2 sector whilst **KWS Ultimatum** from the same breeder offers potential for the North and therefore risk management.

## Feed and biscuit wheats

There are two new outstanding feed wheat considerations on the back of the very successful **KWS Dawsum** and **Champion**, as the market leaders, with **LG Redwald** having set the standards for yield potential.

**Bamford** has, as I highlighted 12 months ago, strolled on to the list as the highest yielding group 3 wheat with yield at least 6% higher than its contemporaries whilst offering the potential for biscuit making (with premium) distilling and export, whilst only KWS Extase has higher untreated yield. Its regional performance in the West merits further consideration.

**LG Beowulf** has joined Champion at the top of the list whilst providing excellent yield in the North and stiff straw (8's for both treated and untreated resistance to lodging), excellent grain quality, very good yellow rust resistance and decent for septoria too. It also has OWBM resistance which not all of the hard group 4's possess.

**Blackstone** is the new soft group 4 from Elsoms to challenge Redwald with excellent yellow rust resistance and superior standing ability and bushel weight.

**Gleam** still appears to have remarkable consistency and **Graham** remains a very popular choice in the west. It of course is also suitable for early drilling which we are likely to see more of this autumn.

If you would like advice on autumn cereal choice and supply, please speak to your agronomist or contact our dedicated seed team: [seed.orders@hlhlt.co.uk](mailto:seed.orders@hlhlt.co.uk)

For more information on any of our products or services, please contact your local Hutchinsons agronomist, or contact us at:

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2023/24 CPD Points Allocation reference numbers:  
NRoSO NO501315f • BASIS CP/128684/2324/g