



# Seven steps to successful spring cereals

Whether planned, or unplanned, there are some key things growers should do to get the most out of spring cereals, as Hutchinsons technical manager, **Dick Neale** explains.



*Dick Neale Hutchinsons Technical Manager*

## 1. Choose varieties wisely

Variety choice depends upon individual situations, soil types, proximity to local markets, etc., and while experienced growers with the right site may be able to reliably grow spring barley for low-nitrogen malting contracts, be realistic about your ambitions.

This is especially true when growing spring barley on heavy land, perhaps for black-grass control, or where wet weather prevented autumn drilling. Achieving low-N malting specification is hard on heavy, fertile soils, so focus on yield instead. Modern spring barley varieties genetically have high yield potential, so can be pushed accordingly.

## 2. Plan cover crop termination

When growing overwinter cover before a spring cereal, termination timing is key for several reasons, including residue management, surface moisture availability, and minimising potential allelopathic effects or nitrogen lock-up in the following crop.

SFI overwinter cover crop (e.g. CSAM2) rules allow cover to be terminated before the end of winter, but no more than six weeks before the following spring crop is sown. Anyone planning early March drilling cannot terminate SFI cover until mid-January therefore.

It is worth noting that where soils remained very wet last winter, there was poor active growth within many cover crops and grassweeds going into the New Year. Consequently, some struggled to achieve good results from a single dose of glyphosate, whereas sequences worked much better.

Recognise this risk if planning to terminate cover crops or other winter growth in early/mid-January and be prepared to apply a follow-up glyphosate treatment pre-drilling if required. Higher rates are typically used at the first timing, reducing for the second where appropriate. ➤





### ➤ 3. Avoid drilling too early

Spring cereals do not require vernalisation, so once germinated, they inherently want to grow rapidly in the shorter season, only spending limited time tillering.

Avoid drilling too early, especially if soils are cold and wet, with little sign of improving. Seed will germinate from 5 degrees C onwards, but ideally should go into soil that is continually warming to avoid the risk of seed germinating, then not growing until temperatures rise.

It may be tempting to drill if a fine weather window appears in mid-January, for example, but sowing a spring variety then is not recommended; if February turns cold and wet, growth may just grind to a halt.

### 4. Prepare seedbeds well

Good seedbed preparation is vital for rapid crop establishment, and with spring cereals the key is to make sure that once seed is drilled, you are not completely reliant on fresh rainfall to make it germinate. Drill seed into moisture, and ensure good seed-to-soil contact, consolidating well to conserve moisture.

### 5. Get seed rate right

For optimum yield in spring barley, aim to establish 750 to 1,000 heads/m<sup>2</sup>, tailoring seed rate to drilling date and seedbed conditions.

Spring barley tillers strongly, so when drilling in late February/early March on heavy land, rates are likely to be around 400 seeds/m<sup>2</sup>.

Generally, less seed is required when drilling later, as crops should tiller better in warmer conditions. By late April/early May though, seed rates will need to increase again given much less time for tillering.

Spring wheat has not been subject to the same genetic breeding and selectivity as spring barley, therefore many varieties feature relatively old genetics. Crucially, spring wheat lacks the tillering capacity of spring barley, and typically has smaller ears containing fewer grains, therefore higher seed rates are needed to drive yield. Target a head count of 500-600/m<sup>2</sup>, which for March drilling is likely to mean sowing around 600 seeds/m<sup>2</sup>.

Remember, maintaining a higher plant population also improves crop competitiveness over grass and broadleaved weeds.

### 6. Place fertiliser

Placement fertiliser is highly recommended in spring crops, especially for phosphorus, which is crucial to root development and tillering.

Placing nutrients in the rooting zone greatly improves uptake efficiency compared with surface applications, facilitating stronger establishment and root development, allowing crops to

quickly build scavenging ability for water and nutrients. This is particularly important where seed may be going into colder soils, and in dry springs, where moisture availability can be a big limiting factor.

Also aim to apply most (circa 80%), if not all, nitrogen into the seedbed at drilling, with rates varied according to soil conditions and yield potential. The remaining 20% should be applied by the four-leaf stage. Consider a foliar methylated urea top-up if conditions are dry, as uptake may be better than soil-applied granular fertiliser.

### 7. Conserve moisture

Conserving seedbed moisture is crucial for effective spring cereal establishment.

Fortunately, last year, moisture availability was not an issue for most spring crops, even those that could not be drilled until late April. But, previous seasons have shown how a lack of spring rain can really restrict growth and yield potential.

For late spring drilling dates (e.g. April onwards), watch long-term weather forecasts closely and make decisions on a daily basis as water availability post-drilling is crucial to crop success. If a long, dry spell after drilling is forecast, you may need another plan.

***Please talk to your agronomist about successful spring cereal establishment, or contact us: [information@hlhltd.co.uk](mailto:information@hlhltd.co.uk)***





# Spring Cropping Options for 2025

Generally, the weather conditions for most regions this autumn have been an improvement on last year (*at the time of writing*) except for the centre of the country, especially the home counties. If the autumn remains kinder, wheat will continue to enter the ground.

*Hutchinsons national seed manager, David Bouch, highlights some cropping options to consider for spring 2025.*

## Spring cereals

Spring barley still offers the best option for rotational suppression of grass weeds (Blackgrass, Ryegrass and Brome), whereas spring wheat will not offer the same level of competitiveness in the field.

### Spring Barley

**LAUREATE** remains the undoubted number one in the marketplace, outselling its competitors whilst offering dual purpose end markets, as does **LG DIABLO**, but not as widely grown. **RGT PLANET** will slip further as the newer options gain a greater share of the market. However, it will still have support from growers who have seen very consistent performance over the years.

**SKYWAY** offers brewing ability and is fully approved, as is now **SY TENNYSON** which is more akin to Laureate with its dual-purpose credentials. Several varieties are under test for malting quality, these include **LG AQUARIUS**, **NOS GAMBIT**, **BELTER**, **NOS MUNRO** and **OLSEN**.

Feed varieties – **WESTMINSTER** and **KELIM** still sell well for this market, but arguably the malting varieties offer better yield.

### Spring Wheat

**MULIKA**, **KWS HARSUM** and **KWS LADUM** are the group 1 offer with the former now under significant yield disadvantage. **KWS LADUM** has no major disease weaknesses, with high resistance to mildew, brown rust and Septoria tritici. It will be a major consideration for next spring. **KWS HARSUM** has OWBM resistance.

**KWS COCHISE**, and to a lesser extent **KWS CHILHAM**, provide alternatives in the group 2 sector, which is little changed. **KWS ALICIUM** has the best yield.

**WPB ESCAPE** has the largest market share with **KWS FIXUM** since its arrival within the sector. It is a relatively late-maturing variety (which will be a limitation to some). Again, it appears that **KWS FIXUM** has no major disease weaknesses, with high resistance to yellow rust, mildew and brown rust. **SEW19-3003SW** (proposed name '**EVERLONG**') being highest yielding at 107 – Group 4.

### Spring Oats:

**WPB ISABEL** is the market leader with **MELRIN** making significant headway.

**CANYON** still has support within the marketplace. Essentially the key to growing spring oats is rainfall in June (key for all oat crops) and timeliness of harvest. **CONWAY** is an early maturing option. **ASTERION** newly added to the Recommended List last autumn has high untreated yields with good resistance to mildew.

The end market will dictate the preferred variety in almost all the spring quality cereals.

## Spring Pulses

### Spring beans

Beans will again be dominated by **LYNX**. **GENIUS** remains the highest yielding option on the descriptive list. **YUKON** has the best mildew resistance and is the earliest maturing. New options for this spring include **NAVARA** and **LG HAWK**, but neither compete with **GENIUS** for pure yield. **SYNERGY** is a new low-vicine and low-convicine variety (LVC) and is higher yielding than the other two LVC varieties, **FUTURA** and **VICTUS**. ➤





David Bouch National Seed Manager

## Spring peas

As far as peas are concerned it will be **CONCERTO** (115%) and **BATIST** (113%), which are the new top-yielding yellow peas. **CARRINGTON** remains the top yielding blue pea. **BLUETIME** will again be popular, and **BUTTERFLY** is new and again showing the strength in depth of the LSPB portfolio. **KAMELEON** (Senova) and **ORCHESTRA** (LSPB) are the standout white peas, however, availability is key. A new pink pea category has been created for the Descriptive List to accommodate the new variety **FLAMINGO** (Cope Seeds & Grain). In trials it was the lowest-yielding pea listed (78%), with specific end markets from uses for human consumption, to bird and pet feed.

**VISION** is the new addition to the list for Marrowfats with the best downy mildew rating of 7 and with the highest yield in the sector, whilst **SAKURA** has shown its consistency and support from the end user. The yield gap is circa 10%, but again, as with anything that involves a quality premium, will be decided by the end user.

The overriding part of this summary is that key varieties will sell out, although as it stands the market itself probably will not.

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



# Our Ongoing Dedication to Soil Health

We are pleased, once again, to affirm our commitment to advancing sustainable farming practices by sponsoring the **Soil Farmer of the Year Competition 2025**. Since 2021, Hutchinsons has proudly supported this initiative, as both a sponsor and a member of the judging panel, and we are committed to continuing to recognise and celebrate farmers who are leading the way in soil health.

The Soil Farmer of the Year 2024 showcased an impressive selection of forward-thinking practices from low input farming systems and cover cropping to the use of diverse swards and biological treatments. Organised by the Farm Carbon Toolkit and Innovation for Agriculture, we will join the judging panel once again, in the 10th year of this competition. In doing so, the Hutchinsons Soils & Agroecology teams aim to inspire more growers to take a deeper look at their soil health and to empower growers with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions that will positively impact both their long-term farm productivity and the environment.

**The 2025 Soil Farmer of the Year competition opened for applications on the 5th December, which was World Soils Day. As we continue to promote soils excellence, we encourage growers who are passionate about soil health to enter and share their innovative approaches.**

**Contact us for more details:**  
[soils@hlhlt.co.uk](mailto:soils@hlhlt.co.uk)





# Be responsive

## TO SPRING CROPPING IN 2025

Hutchinsons farm business consultant **Will Foyle**, shares his thoughts on the best ways to maintain spring gross margins.



The last two seasons have shown us just how much we can no longer rely on suitable conditions for autumn drilling, and for many growers across the UK spring cropping has become a back stop to ensure there is crop to harvest come the summer.

## Spring cropping

### PROS

- Cheaper to grow
- Help to spread workloads
- Provide an opportunity for a cover crop
- Offer much-needed weed control opportunities

### CONS

- Spring crops are riskier to grow
- Lower yield potential
- Can result in a prolonged or later harvest
- Limited choice of agrochemicals in crops such as spring oats

To balance out the risk versus the benefit of spring cropping and protect gross margins as much as possible, work to a planned acreage but be responsive to the season and fleet of foot enough to alter this acreage once the spring arrives.

A level of intentional, planned spring cropping to which additional cropping can be added to has clear benefits rather than a haphazard, last-minute approach.

This can be as simple as ensuring all machinery is working and ready to go as soon as conditions allow.

Planning a certain level of intentional cropping has clear benefits in terms of access to contracts.

If contracts are already in place for some crop, then it is easier to build on these if needed, rather than starting to look for contracts out of the blue.

In a similar way, if already growing sugar beet, then it will be easier to slightly increase quota if required to do so, rather than starting from nothing and fighting every other grower also trying to get their hands on new quota!

Another advantage would be easy access to home-saved seed from the previous spring.

### What to grow

Also consider how the crops fit within the farm system.

The gross margin is important for business planning, but remain aware that crop values can change quickly, so selecting the best crop for the farm also depends on agronomic and market factors.

Spring cropping doesn't have to be the more obvious crops such as barley or pulses, it can also offer a chance to look at potential opportunities for sugar beet or maize for AD or even let-out potatoes.

Spring oats performed well last year, are cheap to grow, and have a slightly wider drilling window.

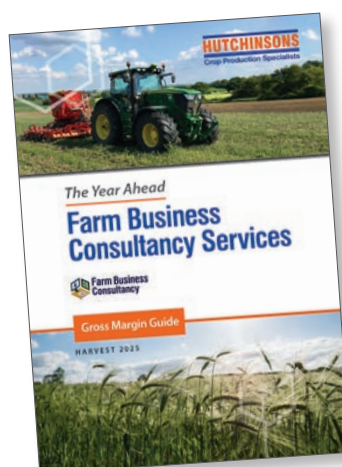
SFI has also opened up some new windows for spring opportunities with lower risk and volatility than traditional spring cropping; A lot of growers are bolting on stewardship or sustainable farming incentive options.

If growing a low input cereal after a winter cover crop, you're getting £365/ha before even starting. From a gross margin point of view, that brings an element of risk mitigation against a more volatile crop. However, this must be well thought through as it requires a three-year commitment so cannot be reduced once agreed, but can be increased.

In some situations, it is worth looking at a spring crop like malting barley rather than a second wheat.

Looking at the gross margin for a spring malting barley crop in a good year that yields up to 7t/ha, it can be as much as £900/ha. In comparison for a second wheat yielding 8.5t/ha, the gross margin would be much lower at £700/ha.

Also, in this scenario where autumn drilling is difficult, it would be better to focus on getting the first wheats drilled in good time and accept a spring barley would be a more sensible option, rather than trying to get a second wheat sown at the same time that will potentially struggle and detract from the first wheat focus.



For gross margins for the key spring cropping options register for our free guide: <https://www.hutchinsons.co.uk/gross-margins-2024>



# NRoSO Arable Professional Update 2024 – 2025

This winter, Hutchinsons is offering face-to-face training of the new, annual NRoSO arable update course, and you can now book and pay for places online. Courses qualify for 10 NRoSO and 6 BASIS CPD points. The main theme this year is:

## Plant Protection Product Storage and Logistics

Detailed review of current legislation of on-farm storage and transportation.

Including:

- Site requirements, construction, bunding, shelving & security
- IBC's, pallets, stock lists
- Transport:
  - Bowsters • Farm vehicles and crop sprayers
  - Trailers • Video - Best Practice case study

The Update will also cover:

- Keeping water clean
- Health & Safety, keeping you and your work colleagues safe and well
- The Official Controls (OCR) Regulations 2020
- HSE Pesticide Enforcement Officer reminder
- Timings in agronomy, NSTS testing, Closed-Transfer Sprayer Filling (CTS)

Included with every course is the 66 page 2024-25 NRoSO handbook, with all the information you need to keep UK crop protection safe and responsible.



### TO BOOK YOUR PLACE(S) & TO PAY:

Our courses run from December – February. Please visit the Events section of the Hutchinsons website for the training dates currently offered around the country: <https://www.hutchinsons.co.uk/event/nroso-workshops-2024-2025>

## Digital tools drive for a more profitable and sustainable farming future

Want to know how the Omnia Digital Farming platform is the next generation farm management system, or how Omnia can help optimise SFI options on your farm to improve business performance?

Visit the Hutchinsons stand at LAMMA (15th & 16th January) and speak to the team to find out how using Omnia on your farm can help answer some of the most challenging topics in UK arable farming.

**Omnia's latest update** confirms Omnia as the most advanced and easy-to-use farm management system. As well as a range of valuable modules such as cost of production, yield mapping, rotational planning and carbon mapping tools, the latest update takes this one step further; complete paperless record keeping and work management is now available to both Hutchinsons and non-Hutchinsons customers alike.

**What more does Omnia's latest update offer?**

- 1. Field Diary module:**  
Extends the current Field Diary into a fully comprehensive farm management system.
- 2. Stock management:** A real-time, feature rich stock management system for keeping track of orders and physical inventory based on what is being used.
- 3. Spray Plan module:** A completely new module, to create spray plans which are then audited by Hutchinsons bespoke HALO crop protection database.

4. Omnia's latest update will be available within the current Field Manager and Business Manager subscription levels, with Business Manager being required for the HALO auditing functionality.
5. For those new to Omnia, the Omnia free Access account allows farmers to experience some limited functionality, including annual cropping plans, farm maps and visualising yield data.

### Questions about SFI and how it can be implemented

Hutchinsons environmental experts will be on hand to demonstrate the latest Omnia functionality, designed to support farmers in efficiently managing and recording Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) actions.

Adding Land Use Options as well as Crop Use and Management Use Options into Omnia simplifies farm management and supports the overall efficiency of farming activities as there is no need for multiple platforms.

The new functionality makes it easier for farmers to stay compliant with SFI requirements from the RPA by generating Yearly Reports. For those needing to produce compliance reports for the food chain, reports can be easily accessed through the Field Diary, as and when required.



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

# HUTCHINSONS

## Crop Production Specialists

H L Hutchinson Limited • Weasenham Lane  
Wisbech • Cambridgeshire PE13 2RN

### Tel: 01945 461177

Email: [information@hutchinsons.co.uk](mailto:information@hutchinsons.co.uk)

@Hutchinsons\_Ag HLHutchinsons

[www.hutchinsons.co.uk](http://www.hutchinsons.co.uk)

2024/25 CPD Points Allocation reference numbers:  
NRoSO NO503459d • BASIS CP/138449/2425/g