

## Trials show early promise for seed treatment

Early results from trials of a new seed dressing on winter wheat suggest emerging crops are better established and further forward.

Crop nutrition specialist Tradecorp is trialling the Humifirst seed treatment with Dunns of Long Sutton. A highly concentrated source of humic and fulvic acids, the company recently introduced the product to the UK market.

During European trials, Humifirst resulted in increased yields of cereals, maize and sugar beet. Tradecorp claims it also leads to improved water holding capacity, soil structure and the stimulation of soil microbes involved in nutrient recycling.

Tradecorp sales manager Chris Tye said: "It creates a humic acid-rich zone around the seed improving the supply of nutrients by mobilising normally unavailable elements and also fixing nutrients that are in excess, enabling their later uptake."

Humifirst is commercially viable because it has a low rate of application, said Mr Tye. It is also compatible with other seed treatment products. Dunns will be looking at more trials with Humifirst on peas later in the year.

Dunns director Peter Busfield said: "Increasing the quality of seed available to customers is of fundamental importance to us as seed producers, and we are constantly looking at products that can offer this."

## Successful strategies for Anglian black-grass control

Minimal spring black-grass control is required for the majority of Anglian winter wheat crops this spring, claims agronomist Paul Drinkwater of Abbotts Ripton Farming, proving the effectiveness of many well-planned autumn programmes.

In response to widespread heavy black-grass infestation, most growers ensured a robust start to their control programme by tackling it at an early growth stage in the autumn.

A lot of growers managed to get their planned application of Atlantis (mesosulfuron-methyl + iodosulfuron-methyl) on pre-Christmas. This placed them in a comfortable position for spring weed control.

"It's done a good job," said Mr Drinkwater. "There's now a relatively small amount of black-grass in the region remaining to be tidied up, with a large proportion of it appearing in late-drilled crops."

Grower Martin Jenkins of Childerley Estates has a comparatively small black-grass population to tackle with Atlantis this spring, thanks to his well-planned black-grass control programme.

Taking advantage of a well-prepared seed bed and good autumn ground conditions, Mr Jenkins took the opportunity to control black-grass early. Glyphosate treatment pre-drilling was followed by a pre-emergence application of Avadex (tri-allate).

Having controlled a good number of the germinating weeds with the pre-em, he decided on an IPU and Stomp (pendimethalin) tank-mix for the post-emergence spray.

Mr Jenkins said: "There's not been too much over-winter competition so the crop's doing well, and we've still got the option of Atlantis to clear up the remaining black-grass."

He also took on the management of an additional 60 hectares of winter wheat part-way through the season. Heavily infested with black-grass coming into the spring, it presents a rather different scenario.

"These two fields will definitely need Atlantis to get rid of the black-grass, but it's not an ideal policy in terms of resistance management. I prefer to control black-grass early and not have to rely on its ability to tackle more advanced weeds."

Growers are reminded that Atlantis must not be used in sequence with any other ALS-inhibiting grass-weed herbicide. Weeds must be actively growing before applying Atlantis – a two or three day delay is required after an extended cold period.

## Who wants to be a civil servant?



Taking a civil servant's view of the grain market means you will no longer have to worry if prices fall, says **Jeremy Cole**.

Wouldn't life be great to be a civil servant with a guaranteed income stretching out in front of you? Life would be simple, planned income, planned expenditure, bliss. Unfortunately, you are a farmer and life is not that simple – or is it?

Over the past 10 years, the Net Farm Income (NFI) per 100 hectares has ranged from a profit of £32,000 in the heady days of 1995 to the nightmare of a £4000 loss in 2001. The average profit is about £12,000.

These figures, which were produced by the Home-Grown Cereals Authority, are no basis to run a business. It is impossible to budget, forward plan, invest and is likely to give you an ulcer in the meantime trying to do so.

However, you can be a civil servant. You can have a pre-planned minimum NFI, but you may have to adapt and learn a few new techniques. Price Risk Management is needed. Throw away that 45-degree risk angle and get a flatter one. One that doesn't reduce your NFI if the market falls but does increase the NFI if the market rises.

Of course, this may sound too good to be true. But by the use of Call or Put Options, a MINIMUM NFI for up to two years ahead can be fixed. This, like insurance, involves a premium payable by the grower.

The premium is the maximum 'bet' with the market and maximum loss if the market doesn't move to your advantage. However, who complains if they don't crash their car or the family farmhouse doesn't burn down? Nobody, they just renew their premiums for the next season. It is the same with the price risk management tool.

Then, sit back and let the market do what it likes. You will no longer worry. If it falls, especially more than the Option premium, the grower is happy they sold early. If the market rises, the grower is also happy as they gain more money, once the premium is covered, even though the original sale was proved incorrect.

The grower's NFI is protected, regardless of what the very volatile grain market wishes to do. This can be done up to two years before the grain leaves the farm and one year once it is in the shed, generally for approx £3/t.

Price risk management and training in the use of Futures and Options, are seen as a key element in obtaining the best from the present volatile grain market. So get a plan, set a budget, sell and apply the hedge to fix the minimum NFI.

Go on, become a civil servant and even you can look forward to a generous pension.

*Jeremy Cole, Bsc Agri Econ (Reading) has run Agricole, since 1993. It is an independent grain brokering and marketing service for farmers, offering a weekly grain market report. For details, call 01954 719452.*