



Savvy marketing can make the most of downward commodity prices, says Jeremy Cole

market. Ethanol has been a big demand factor, but less so recently. This was due to a fall in US fuel consumption, itself due to more efficient cars and the bad economy. Beware a shift to natural gas if corn prices continue upwards. Ethanol is no longer a demand side driver.

US corn exports have been reducing. Over the past three years, drought in US has meant lower production and so less exportable surplus but has led to a dramatic increase corn prices. This has incentivised other corn producing countries to increase their acreage of corn and began to export more. The US once controlled 75% of the world corn export market. Now it's only 35%.

US corn production in 2013 is way up, with prices down after four poor yields. There have never been five yields lower than the average trend line since 1850, so odds suggest production will be up for 2014 crop although less corn may be drilled if corn stays at \$4.50 bushel/acre.

In summary, the 2014 harvest price outlook is \$3.50 bushel/acre versus \$4.60 now and \$8.50 in 2012. This may very well pull wheat prices down too. I feel there would have to be a 2012 drought event to get corn back to \$5-6/bushel.

can't produce enough to meet domestic demand. This will continue, so a rally is unlikely as it is already factored into traders' calculations. China is building reserves over time so imports will not increase significantly.

The US planted 82m acres of soya this year as the market's high prices influenced producers to plant more. But it also influenced other countries like Brazil and Argentina. The South American crop will harvest in March onwards – and a big crop should lead to lower prices, affecting prices and US intentions to drill.

In conclusion, it appears that all commodities look to be following a downward price trend for the foreseeable future – with weather events making life more 'interesting' in the short-term.

To protect your budget and achieve your standard of living, may I suggest selling up to 50% of the 2014 crop forward now, or at least entering into negotiations to secure minimum price contracts or options.

This would mean a £135/t minimum price for November 2014 wheat and a £280/t minimum price for oilseed rape. These may not be the values you want. But are you a gambler or do you want a worst-case scenario built into your marketing?

OILSEEDS

Again concentrating on the US as a lead indicator to the overall oilseeds market, US soybeans are trading at 1286c/b. The last time this happened was spring 2012, when there was a big drought and prices reached nearly 1800c/b. This increased acres drilled and prices fell.

Factors affecting the oilseeds market include China. Its domestic usage remains strong with clear upward demand. Consumption of soya is rising as more protein is consumed. Chinese soya stocks will increase this year.

Chinese imports remain strong – again a clear upward demand – as it



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Three new stars for East Anglian growers

The new HGCA Recommended Lists include some standout varieties for East Anglia growers, says Nidera seeds manager **Russell Frost**.

A new milling wheat with the yield potential of a feed wheat, a high yielding group 4 with outstanding disease resistance and a high output oilseed rape hybrid are some of the main points of next year's recommended lists for the region's arable producers.

Some 25 new varieties have been added to the lists with an emphasis on helping growers target specific markets and assist with pest and disease control. Interestingly, the HGCA say about the same number of varieties were removed from the list.

In terms of wheat, I would say the new group one milling variety Skyfall is the single most interesting addition to the lists and actually takes the game several steps on in what is a difficult arena to enter.

Not only is it the highest yielder in the group by some margin, it also has short, stiff straw and no obvious agronomic weaknesses.

On the quality side, it has a good hagger and protein content is very acceptable. But as it's going to be in big demand, it's bound to be in short supply.

Those growers in the region who already get good results with the likes of Gallant and Solstice will love Skyfall. It's got 102% of the control yield compared to 96% for both of those varieties.

The reception from the trade is also positive and we're already offering a guaranteed buy back contract on all the Skyfall we sell.

It is, however, a little bit harder to pinpoint specific advantages of the new additions to group two on the list. Cubanita and KWS Cashel look to be strong performers as they're both short, stiff winter wheats but it's always difficult to be successful in group two unless you have a specific advantage.

Cubanita yields well but it will be difficult to see growers switching over to it from Cordiale as it is so much earlier to harvest and always gets a bigger premium than other group twos.

In group three, new varieties Zulu and Icon are both good all-round varieties with strong yield potential for Eastern growers.

Both stand well, are good on disease resistance and both are potentially suitable for distilling and uks soft wheat for export.

The top half of group three is quite closely contested now but these two new varieties are solid performers that deserve to do well.

When it comes to soft group four varieties both newcomers – Panacea and Twister – have recommendations for the North only. Leeds is still a very strong contender in this group, however, with a full UK recommendation.

The other big news for arable producers in the region is the hard group four variety Evolution which is regarded as a valuable addition to the recommended lists.

It's equal in yield to the best in the group, but has significantly better disease resistance, particularly with regard to rusts, when compared to the others.

This will be a real advantage for growers in East Anglia where the disease susceptibility of the top performing group fours has always been an issue.

Evolution equals Kielder in terms of yield but has significantly better resistance scores for Mildew and both Yellow and Brown rusts which means there is a very good reason to consider moving over to it from some of the more established names.

The two new feed barleys KWS Tower and Tetris add real depth to the recommended list – both are sound varieties.

The final standout variety is the hybrid oilseed rape Incentive which represents a significant step forward in oilseed rape performance over the established higher yielders of recent years.

It's a good all-rounder with excellent oil content, good lodging resistance and will definitely be in big demand in 2014.

New conventional varieties Charger and Trinity are not that far behind either in terms of yield, but have lower oil contents and poorer resistance to Light Leaf Spot.

With the top three varieties in oilseed rape all new recommendations, there's real excitement and development in the crop now.

Fabb-ulous far

Qualities learnt in farming can be transferred to other sectors with good effect, as one Cambridgeshire contractor has found. **Emily Padfield** reports.

To be a successful contractor there are several key attributes that are indispensable, including tenacity, energy, practicality and reliability. These strengths are also crucial to breaking into other sectors, as Daniel Fabb, owner of DRA Fabb contractors, knows only too well.

Daniel bought his first John Deere when he was 18, and started baling large industrial bales for power stations with a New Holland big baler. He supplied Ely power station, as well as selling a percentage for animal bedding.

By the second season, demand had become strong enough to warrant another tractor and baler, and so Daniel also had to think about extra staff. Outlets for bales also started to expand, with some being bought for chopping plants, carrot cover and a proportion being sent to other power stations further afield.

"In the third year, we ran another baler and purchased our own yard, where we are based today," he explains. It soon became evident that to provide the best service possible, it would be necessary to offer a full service, from the swath to the barn.

"We bought our first bale chaser and also started to offer haulage services by buying our first lorry. This was followed by a second and a third – and now we operate the haulage under a separate company – R F Straw – headed up by Chris Rodger."

In the quieter winter months, Daniel hired himself and his tractor out and carried out a number of

general farm work duties, as well as fabrication work.

Fabrication still plays an important part in DRA Fabb's portfolio and the team manufacture tried and tested single ram bale grabs and forks, as well as undertaking specialist jobs.

"The largest in the range will grab three large Hesstons or four midis and the same bale grabs will also close small enough to grab two large Hesstons or three midis. We also make bale spikes with various tine and back plates," adds Daniel.

Unafraid to try new things, he is currently taking part in a trial run on behalf of the government testing over-length trailers to see the viability of these longer trailers on the road.

DRA Fabb now runs five NH BB9090 balers and produces upwards of 40,000 bales each year. "Quite a lot of our customers have been with us for ten years," Daniel explains. "We try our best to provide a full service to customers so that straw is baled and lifted in as short a time as possible."

In addition to running the five, four Heath Super Chasers make sure bales are gathered and stacked at the side of fields ready for lorries to allow farmers to get on with cultivation and drilling. "We run a high chaser to baler ratio to enable quick clearance."

"There's no question that we are over-equipped to some extent – but it's a conscious decision to provide a better service."

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We wish Dan and Helen continuing success in developing their herd of Hereford cattle.

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