

Winter linseed remains a viable alternative to OSR



Whilst some growers are choosing to return to OSR this season, many are still looking for alternative break crop options. According to Nigel Padbury of Premium Crops, winter linseed remains a strong consideration.

“Like most crops, linseed yields have been slightly down this year, and for many growers this may be a sticking point to re-sowing the crop,” he acknowledges.

“Its important to recognise that whilst the weather did have an impact, many crops were not as badly affected as first thought; the extremely cold and harsh winds in March did affect many crops but in general they came back and by flowering it was hard to tell where there had been previous damage.”

“Infact, we monitored over 10,000 hectares of production last year and can say with accuracy that 94.7% of crops survived, which equates to only 1 in 20 fields facing total loss.”

“The high prices that are currently on offer for linseed are hard to ignore, which are very high approaching £500/tonne! This makes the gross value for the crop look very competitive at over £1000/ha and significantly, contracts for both winter and spring linseed harvest 2022 reflect this higher price.

Mr Padbury does recommend that winter linseed should be grown on contract as it is a fairly small market.

“Winter linseed doesn’t suffer from cabbage stem flea beetle,” he adds.

“There is some confusion because flax stem flea beetle, which is active in the spring, can hit spring-sown linseed crops. But you don’t find it in the autumn, which is why winter linseed is unscathed.”

“Any slug damage in winter linseed is minimal,” he continues.

“As far as blackgrass control is concerned, there is more time to prepare stale seed-beds with linseed, as it is drilled a month later than oilseed rape.”

Also for consideration are the lower input requirements of the crop, especially for nitrogen adds Mr Padbury. “Winter crops in 2021 typically only required 80-130kg/ha N, which is only half of that required for OSR. “

Grower experience

The security of knowing he will get an actual crop is one of the main reasons that Nottinghamshire grower Alastair Baseley of JS Peake & Sons, switched from OSR to winter linseed. Flea beetle, slugs and pigeons had become a losing battle, so the promise of fewer pest problems, and lower input costs moved him towards linseed.

“With linseed you get benefits in the following wheat crop, and the rotational margin is important.”

Mr Baseley grew linseed last year and despite the crop not performing as well as he would have liked, he is keen to give it another go.

“You can’t make a decision on one year’s results, so I am prepared to give the linseed another chance.”

This year Mr Baseley will drill 27ha's of the variety Attila, all of which will go to Premium Crops for seed. "Drilling too early can be a mistake as we don't want to the crop to get too tall, but it has to be in time to survive the winter. We aim for the end of September/beginning of October and by then it has given us a good chance to get off as much black-grass as possible."

"A good seed bed is crucial as the linseed seed is so small." Cultivations are min till using a Sumo with 10" deep legs. The seedbed is then Cambridge rolled, drilled and then rolled again.

Hannah Foxall, agronomist with Premium Crops, recommends drilling 450seeds/m² for winter linseed but points out that the kg/ha sowing rate will be variety dependent and should be checked.

Early weed control is key, and for Mr Baseley generally this starts with a pre-emergence application of 0.75-1/ha Basilico (mesotrione). Where there is particularly bad black-grass Avadex liquid at 3.6l/ha is added to the mix which works well and is physically compatible with the Basilico, he adds.

Once the crop has emerged and is about 2.5cms tall, Ms Foxall recommends using either Centurion Max (Clethodim) or Falcon (proprazine) to mop up any volunteer cereals, wild oats, brome and sensitive blackgrass.

If heading towards Christmas there is still any black-grass or meadow-grass then Crawler (carbetamide) at 2.5kg/ha is an option – although she adds that this is only available for use until November 2022.

Ms Foxall also recommends an autumn fungicide application of Difcor (Difenoconazole) to control Kabietella Linicola (disease similar to Phoma in OSR)

A good spring PGR programme, such as 0.3l/ha Toprex (difenoconazole + paclobutrazol) is key to a successful winter crop because of lodging risk from flowering onwards. Mr Baseley agrees, recognising that missing the PGR in the spring of this year as the crop was behind was a mistake, as once it rained the crop took off and got too tall.

"We won't make that mistake this year!"

Attention to detail with crop nutrition is essential, adds Ms Foxall.

"I usually recommend between 80-100kg/N/ha in total . The first spilt of about 50kg N/ha needs to go in April for winter linseed to wake it up. Sulphur and P+K can be addressed at this time as well along with any any micronutrient deficiencies.

“FYM applications can help tremendously with crop reliability by improving both crop nutrition and drought tolerance.”

EAMU granted for mesotrione

Linseed growers still have a means of controlling difficult-to-control broad leaved weeds thanks to an ‘Extension of Authorisation for Minor Use’ (EAMU) granted for the herbicide Basilico (mesotrione) for use in both spring and winter linseed.

Manufactured by off-patent manufacturers Life Scientific, Basilico contains 100 g/l mesotrione and is reverse engineered from the reference product, Callisto.

Previously used as a post emergence herbicide in crops of grain and forage maize to control annual broad-leaved weeds. Basilico’s new EAMU allows the product to be used on both winter and spring linseed as a pre emergence treatment. The maximum rate of use is 1.5 l/ha.

Ruth Stanley, country manager for Life Scientific says. “Concerns were raised because of holes being opened up across the weed control spectrum. Maya (Bromoxynil) is being withdrawn, with an end date/use-up date of 17 September 2021.”

“Fat hen control is important in spring linseed because it is a tall competitive weed which can make combining more difficult. However, with a diminished toolbox, fat hen control could become difficult.

“Basilico has activity on charlock, black nightshade, chickweed, field pansy, fat hen, volunteer oilseed rape and redshank.”

“As it is applied pre-emergence, there are no worries about scorch, such as you might see in spring crops when applying post-emergence herbicides.”

“Even when there has been a lot of rain after application, with the threat of it being pushed down through the soil profile, it has been found to be really safe.”

She points out that one of the problems is that for EAMU approvals for minor crops such as linseed, CRD requires the same detailed information on seed residues and the environmental profile as for major crops. Minor Crops do not have the resources to do this.

“This means for linseed that we have to extrapolate from data collected on other oilseeds, such as oilseed rape. Even though many cereal herbicides are safe on linseed.”

“However, some of the herbicides used on rape are not suitable for linseed, so it is crucial to choose one which has activity across the weed spectrum and yet not damage the crop.

“This makes replacing lost chemistry challenging for linseed and getting new products approved, such as Basilico, useful and an important part of the herbicide toolbox.”

The EAMU can be downloaded from the CRD website or <https://lifescientific.com/wp-content/uploads/Basilico-Linseed.pdf>