

# Stacking the odds in your favour

Farming has always been to some degree a gamble, reliant on many factors we cannot control. In a period of extraordinary volatility with high output prices, but equally high input prices, the stakes have never been higher.

David Howard (Hutchinsons Head of ICM) explains.



David Howard  
(Hutchinsons Head of ICM)

An analysis of the figures will have found that gross margins for wheat, OSR and many other crops still look favourable despite higher fertiliser prices. In fact, higher output prices will bring areas of fields and parts of the farm previously discounted as marginal or unprofitable back into consideration. Growers will have also no doubt noticed the significantly increased input cost required to achieve those gross margins, driven largely by the increase in fertiliser cost but also fuel and labour. It all comes down to risk and our attitude towards it.

So, what are the options for reducing the level of exposure on farm in the coming year/s?

One of the key elements will be consistency, because though the potential for reward is high, with high input costs the cost of failure is too. Therefore, when it comes to growing crops with high input costs, ideally, we need to be targeting those inputs where the likelihood of return is greatest and maximising efficiency where land is habitually low return or highly variable.

The best way to do this is to look back over previous years' yield maps and compare areas of the field over multiple years and multiple crops. We have done this on multiple Helix sites across the country and the common finding has been that regardless of season, the higher

yielding parts of the field remain comparatively high yielding and the lower yielding remain low, the only variation is in the average yield.

Within Omnia this can be done quite simply, as growers can combine multiple years' yield information to produce a field performance map. In the example map (see overleaf) with a high value, high input crop, we have a good chance of a ROI in the green area of the field and given the market price we might also extend that out into the white areas, if the cause of the variability is understood. However, the red areas would be prime for either alternative use or reducing the amount of input in those areas through variable application.





**Above: Field Performance Map within Omnia**

**Green = consistently good Red= consistently poor White= inconsistent**

> When planning next year's cropping it is important that those crops with the highest input costs/risk, where rotation allows, are grown on the least variable land. Growers can also take advantage of variable rate application to ensure that costs are related to the optimum for their potential yield rather than the field standard.

For many it will be worth assessing the farm's current rotation to ensure it meets the business requirements and its preferred level of risk. Though, given current prices, large percentages of winter wheat and oilseed rape will look financially attractive, they also expose the business to exceedingly high capital costs and may need to be tempered by including crops with lower commitment levels, like peas and beans or spring crops (which will also help where cashflow is an issue).

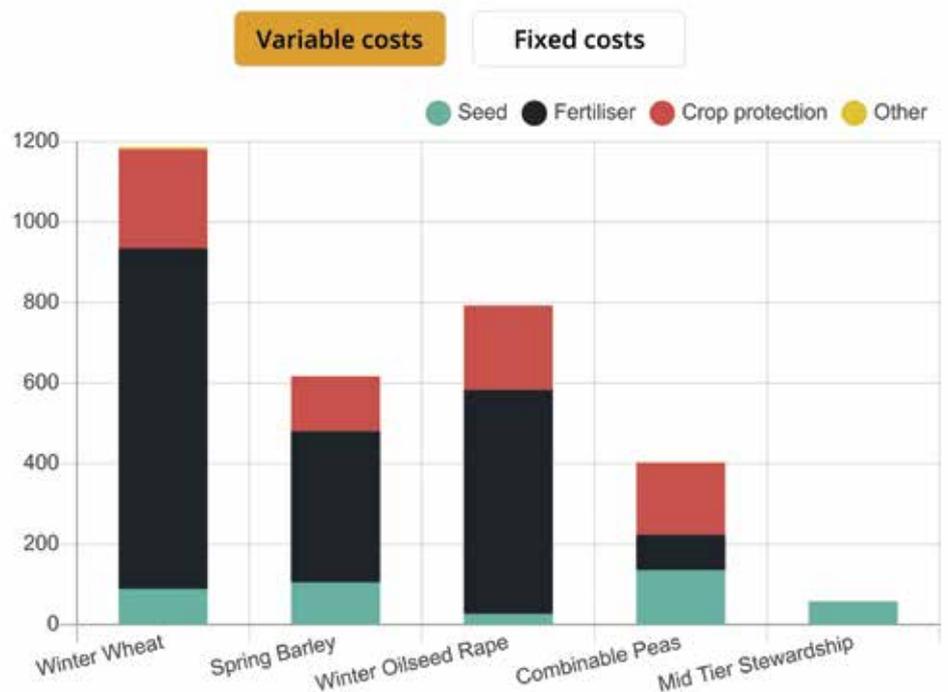
It is important that high output prices do not jeopardise good rotational management. Rotations are essential in reducing pest and disease pressure, particularly in key crops like oilseed rape, where longer rotations and improving rotational management are essential in maximising establishment to allow the crop to tolerate flea beetle pressure. Though we have had more successful oilseed rape crops in recent years, the crop is still high risk in certain parts of the country and should only be considered where good soil condition and soil moisture are guaranteed.

Though gross margins may not look quite as attractive, retaining or increasing legumes in rotations will provide very valuable nitrogen to the following crop, allowing growers to reduce their N requirement and carbon footprint. It is important that these benefits, which are quite significant at current nitrogen prices, are included in any planning. Equally, some of the more rotational environmental stewardship options, like legume and herb mixes, could help buffer rotations offering very low risk, consistent returns. However, because these options now look somewhat uncompetitive vs other crops it will be about finding the correct balance of risk and reward for your farm business.

Whilst gross margin and net margin assessments of crops are useful to give a sense of a crop's potential, they tend to be an average across all fields and do not have field-by-field resolution. With the need to analyse rotations in greater detail, we have designed the Farm business planning tool in Omnia to make visualising some of these decisions simpler. Within this tool you can compare different crops, varieties, and fields to review both costs and financial reward. Field by field analysis will become more important where costs are high as they are key to finding areas of inefficiency or where management should be adapted.

Risk will always be an inevitable part of farming but with the appropriate strategy the level of risk can be managed to suit any business' needs.

**For more information on Omnia digital services and planning tools, please visit our website: [www.omniaprecision.co.uk](http://www.omniaprecision.co.uk) or email: [consultancy@omniaprecision.co.uk](mailto:consultancy@omniaprecision.co.uk)**



**Output from Omnia planning tool - note significant impact of N cost in different crops**

# Top tips

## for autumn grass management

Against a back drop of rising input costs, farmers need to look at maximising the output from their grassland by focussing on a few key agronomy management practices this autumn, is the advice from **Jim Clark**, Carlisle-based agronomist with Hutchinsons.



**Jim Clark**  
(Agronomist Carlisle)

## Five Top Tips for grass management

1. Look closely at the soils for compaction or poaching and plan any sward restoration work around this.
2. Know the weed burden in each field. Recognise that docks need a specific management plan.

**This means looking at grass more as an arable crop such as creating a long term plan for reseeding and controlling weeds and a soil health plan.**

The most important step is often the first, and managing grassland is no different. Get out and walk the grass, and really look at its condition.

So, take note of how much cover there is across the field, what is the weed burden particularly in relation to docks, and also any poaching and compaction. Take some soil samples as you go to check your pH, P and K levels.

Poached and compacted soils carry a higher weed burden, chickweed can be a particular issue, but docks are a major problem this spring as a result of a milder winter and stock out-wintered for longer causing bare soil - and docks love open ground.

3. Choose grass varieties carefully taking into account suitable herbicide programmes.
4. Choose the correct reseeding approach depending on sward quality and soil temps.
5. Time slurry applications to compliment the best possible establishment.

Choose grass varieties with the weed burden and herbicide options in mind. For example if including clover in the sward, many dock and chickweed herbicides will knock this out as well, so its important to plan ahead when thinking about reseeding and if fields have a high weed burden sow a short term or even a different crop for a few years to get them under control before sowing your clover and herbal lays.

Remember that some herbicides are much kinder to the grass when carrying out weed control than others and you don't want to check the grass growth in spring, so use a softer product based around Fluroxypyr.

When reseeding, seed to soil contact is essential for good establishment. So unless the soil is bare avoid a scratch harrow air drill. When direct drilling seeds into the sward,



New functionality in



available this summer

The next stage of the development of the Omnia Business Planning Tools will be launched this summer. Visitors to the Hutchinsons Regional Technology Centre and Helix Farm open days will be brought up to date with two exciting new functionality developments.

- **The Rotational Planner** allows users to create potential scenarios to measure the potential impact of specific practices and inputs on carbon emissions and yields. The improved functionality and automation of the Field Performance tool builds on the Production Tool 'shed' launched last year which allows users to calculate specific operational costs that they have used to grow a crop in £/ha or tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e/ha.
- **The Soil Management Planner** offers users the functionality to create soil management plans to demonstrate compliance with the DEFRA SFI Soil Standard due to come into practise this summer.

For more information, email the Omnia team: [consultancy@omniaprecision.co.uk](mailto:consultancy@omniaprecision.co.uk)

temperature is key to success. Cooler temps of 6-8°C suit Italians and Westerwolds, but later perennials and clover need 9-10°C.

Grass should be sown before applying slurry, particularly if going on in bands, as if drilled after the slurry is applied it is much harder for the drills to penetrate the soil which affects soil: seed contact.

For advice on grassland management, please contact us: [information@hlhLtd.co.uk](mailto:information@hlhLtd.co.uk)

# Cereal choices for autumn 2022



David Bouch  
(National Seed Manager)

In the hard endosperm group, the two new varieties added offer high yield with strong disease and OWBM resistance.

**Champion** is the highest yielding variety on the list.

It will find strong demand, with limited seed supply.

**KWS Dawsum** has outstanding grain quality with a bushel weight of nearly 80 and a Hagberg over 300. When this is coupled with a very good agronomic package (only Extase has higher untreated yield) and good standing ability, it will find a big market. Dawsum does not have OWBM resistance like Champion, but this should not hold it back, as it is also the highest yielding variety in the West.

**Gleam, SY Insitor** and **Graham** will undoubtedly remain popular, whilst newcomer **LG Typhoon** will attract support and interest with a consistent yield in all regions and very strong agronomics.

## Winter Oats and Hybrid Rye

**Mascani** remains the most popular variety with oat millers and growers, being less susceptible to mildew than most recommended varieties and with moderate resistance to crown rust. **RGT Southwark** provides the highest yield on the Recommended List, but the millers drive variety choice.

**Hybrid Rye** builds in popularity, with high grain yields competing with many second wheats, high blackgrass suppression, high straw yield, excellent drought tolerance and developing end markets. Varieties **Poseidon, Helltop, SU Performer, Serafino** and **Tayo** are key options for autumn 2022.

Please speak to your agronomist about appropriate variety choice, or contact us: [information@hlhlt.co.uk](mailto:information@hlhlt.co.uk)

Now into early summer, we look ahead with David Bouch (Hutchinsons National Seed Manager), to autumn 2022 and some of the varietal considerations to be made.

## Winter barley

Not many additions to the AHDB winter barley list offer an improvement on last year. **Hyvido** choices should be relatively straight forward with **Kingsbarn, Thunderbolt** and **Belmont** being logical selections, however Javelin can still offer an alternative. Concerns about its higher brackling score are certainly understood, but with its earlier ripening than its competitors and its outstanding Rhynchosporium score it should not be discounted. Moving on to conventional six row, newcomer **KWS Feeris** presents this option with the bonus of BYDV tolerance coupled with good bushel weight and very low screenings.

Finally, the two row barleys are a very simple choice. **Craft** and **Electrum** remain the preferred malting varieties with the end users and in the feed market its **KWS Tardis, Bolton, Bordeaux** and **LG Lightning**, in that order, with Tardis being the outstanding choice.

## Winter wheat

No dramatic changes in this sector. **Skyfall, Zyatt, Crusoe** and **Illustrious** for the **NABIM Group 1** market with **Crusoe** being the preferred quality and the best converter of Nitrogen to protein.

(Milling premiums are currently an unknown quantity) I would advise that growing Group one wheats is only suited to those who can consistently produce full spec, otherwise the risks are too high.

**Group 2** will remain in the clutch of **KWS Extase** with its very high untreated yield and a realistic end market. **Mayflower**, new to the AHDB list, offers excellent untreated yield but is behind Extase when treated scores are considered.

**Group 3** has several new additions, although I believe that **LG Astronomer** still has the best all round package. Not the highest yield, but sufficient given its excellent grain quality and good agronomics. **KWS Guium** is now the highest yielding Group 3, but I would like it to have better Septoria resistance. **RGT Rashid** has the best Septoria score in the sector but offers no yield advantage over Astronomer. Both Rashid and Guium have OWBM resistance.

**Group 4** wheats see **Skyscraper** with 10% of the market and being challenged by newcomer **RGT Bairstow** with a step up in Septoria resistance compared to the market leader. Both need a robust PGR programme. **Saki** will still have support, especially where early drilled.



# Mitigating risk with environmental stewardship

For one Suffolk farmer, the chance to mitigate risk and build resilience into the business has been a journey into adapting an approach to maximise environmental schemes.



Hannah Joy (Environmental Services Specialist)

## Farming along the Suffolk coast near Wenhaston, Michael and Trish Gower have always farmed in sympathy with the environment.

Old Hall Farm is a typical Suffolk small mixed farm spread over higher clay ground, big areas of sandy soil down to marsh loams which historically have supported a dairy and pig fattening unit, alongside an arable rotation.

However over the last decade the dairy and pigs have gone, and with fluctuating markets and ever increasing input prices, the Gowers were looking to reduce gross margin volatility and protect the business against this risk.

"The turbulence of the last few years has driven us to look at how else we could 'farm' the land. We needed to move away from seeing success as a pile of grain in the store, which in reality had probably cost more to grow than it was worth," says Michael.

"We were in ELS with a few field margins and some wild bird cover, but felt that we could do more and wanted to see if we could make this pay, whilst also addressing some areas of poorer soil health."

"For example, we are looking at incorporating things such as two year sown legume fallow mixes to help improve soil health."

Working with agronomist Dan Robinson of Agrivice and Hutchinsons Environmental Services Hannah Joy, the Gowers wanted a balance between shorter- and longer-term options to give some flexibility, so if things should change and there was a need to come out of the schemes or put some of the land back into arable cropping for any reason, there was the option to do so.

"It was not just about taking whole areas out of production but improving them, and only removing areas that were consistently poor year on year, and on which we will look at longer term environmental options," explains Dan Robinson.

Hannah then produced a plan for the whole farm based on this; a blue print of what the new rotation would look like, he says.

"One area of about 10ha of particularly heavy clay fell into this category, so we have decided to put this down to woodland," says Hannah. "To support this we will create habitats of pollen and nectar wild bird mixes to support the woodland. We are also planting and restoring about 800m of hedgerows."

A particular characteristic of farming in this area are the marshes which have traditionally supported grazing cattle on the permanent grassland, notes Hannah. "Old Hall Farm has 22

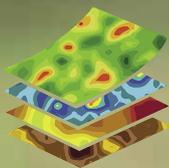
acres of marshes and we are looking at how we can work more closely with DEFRA to develop this as a priority habitat for wetland waders, which could involve damming up some of the dykes to make it wetter."

"The Suffolk Wildlife Trust are very supportive and we are also working with local volunteer groups - its key to have this local support and understanding of what we are trying to achieve," adds Michael.

**"To be clear, this is not a re-wilding project but a response to market pressures on a small farm business. We will be farming in harmony with the local environment and maximising the financial benefits of doing so."**

Michael very much believes that it has been essential to work as a team. "Each of us brings our own perspective to the table from land owner, to agronomist and environmental specialist. Also knowing that all the paperwork and processes are being managed for us is very helpful. Hannah is submitting our mid-tier application, so that's one less thing for us to think about."

**If you are seeking stewardship advice on your farm, please contact the Environmental Services team: [enviro@hlhlt.co.uk](mailto:enviro@hlhlt.co.uk)**



TerraMap



*Dick Neale (Hutchinsons  
Technical Manager)*



*Ian Roberston  
(Head of Soils)*



# Launch of TerraMap Gold

**Ian Robertson** (Hutchinsons Head of Soils) and **Dick Neale** (Technical Manager) reveal details of a new advanced soil mapping and analysis service

This season sees Hutchinsons combine the most accurate and repeatable soil mapping (**TerraMap**) with the most comprehensive soil analysis (**Healthy Soils Gold**) to give an unrivalled soil nutritional and management service, **TerraMap Gold**.

The Gold soil analysis has been utilised for several years and has formed the basis of our Healthy Soils assessment service, measuring Physical, Chemical and Biological attributes. Combining these services allows us to accurately measure within fields and then understand why the soil behaves like it does and its influence on crop performance. We can then take proactive management decisions to ensure we maximise farm profitability.

Once TerraMapped, at 800 data points per ha, the system can decide where to physically collect the Gold soil samples. With 31 different elements analysed by the Gold soil test, it is an ideal partner for the high-resolution data of TerraMap. With this increased data collection, more informed decisions can be made.

## Buffer pH layer

This is a different measure to the normal water pH and basically tells us how much reserve acidity there is in the soil, or what the resting pH of the soil is likely to be.

This is very important in understanding how nutrients cycle in the soil. Phosphorous is key and has a peak cyclability between pH 6.2 and 6.8. If your buffer pH is outside these values, then you need to carefully consider your phosphate management policy. If for example the field displays a large variation in buffer pH, this would mean that you would need to have two phosphate management plans to optimise phosphorous utilisation.

The TerraMap Gold soil analysis also offers **Cation exchange capacity** and **soil texture**, mapping out the soil's ability to hold, store and exchange nutrients, as well as understanding the soil's bulk density, which will highlight potential structural issues, leading to informed management decisions around cultivations and cover crops.

## Nutrient reserves and availability

Mapped layers show the total nutrient reserves and plant available levels of all the macro elements. These are expressed in kg/Ha, which make for much easier understanding and building of nutrient requirements for different cropping situations. There may be significant differences between the total reserves and the actual plant available nutrients, this will generally be caused by one of the

numerous nutrient interactions within the soil and therefore the **TerraMap Gold** measures 31 parameters to ensure we understand these interactions and how best to manage them for peak soils contribution.

## Structure and cultivations

The relationships between the chemical elements in the soil reserves can have a distinct effect on soil structure and workability. Couple this with the soil texturing and organic matter content, it really helps in making decisions about suitability to different cultivation methods. Regardless of cultivation methods applied, low calcium, high magnesium soils are always likely to retain moisture and be difficult to work and the clay and silt elements in the soil's texture further help to predict the soil's behaviour. These are all measured and therefore we can develop cultivation strategies in conjunction with bulk amendments to optimise the soil's structure.

**TerraMap Gold allows for accurate measurement, prediction, and intervention at an unrivalled resolution across your entire farmed area. For more information, contact us: soils@hlh ltd.co.uk**

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 • Weasenhams Lane  
Wisbech • Cambridgeshire PE13 2RN

### Tel: 01945 461177

Fax: 01945 474837

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

@Hutchinsons\_Ag HLHutchinsons

## [www.hlh ltd.co.uk](http://www.hlh ltd.co.uk)

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