

Alternative Break Crops?

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Winter oilseed rape is still a good bet as a break crop for harvest 2009, as it will perform better in terms of gross margins than most pulses, according to ProCam Group agronomist Nick Myers.

“Some growers may be tempted to make a knee-jerk reaction against winter oilseed rape in favour of pulses, particularly as growing costs are increasing so much, but I would advise them that this is not the best route to take, particularly when it comes to gross margins,” says Nick.

“Cropping options should be based on gross margins as well as costs and key agronomy issues and looking at gross margins winter rape still is top of the class.”

He points out that despite increasing fertiliser and fuel costs, winter oilseed rape is still likely to produce a higher gross margin than beans. “There is quite a bit of increased interest in beans at the moment, but you really need to be able to produce a top quality sample of spring beans for the human consumption market before you come anywhere near competing with oilseed rape.”

Mr. Myers has calculated that a winter oilseed rape yielding 3.5 tonnes/hectare at a price of £340/tonne would result in a gross margin of £823/hectare. “If you can produce a higher yield of, say 4.27 tonnes/ha, this would increase the gross margin of winter rape to an impressive £1085/ha.”

“Compare this to winter beans yielding 3.5 t/ha at a price of £180/t this will give a gross margin of £467/ha or spring beans yielding 3.7 t/ha that will give a gross margin of £467/ha. Admittedly if you manage to get an export contract for spring beans, this can raise the gross margin to £662/ha, but it is still quite a way behind oilseed rape,” says Nick.

He points out that winter linseed could be another option to compete with pulses. “With a price potential of £400/tonne and at a modest yield of 2.5 t/ha, my calculation shows a gross margin of £588/ha for linseed.”