

## Just enough time for further oilseed rape drilling

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Data from three years of ProCam's powerful 4cast agronomy database indicates that yields from winter oilseed rape drilled into late September and even early October are comparable with earlier sown crops.

"A lot of growers are asking about late sowing of oilseed rape following the unusually wet weather and late wheat harvest," says ProCam Group agronomist Nick Myers.

"According to our 4cast data covering three years and 15,000ha, it is still worth sowing rape well into September, providing seedbed conditions and early control of slugs and pigeons are managed well enough. Most of this data was taken from crops in England, so it is worth noting that the further North you go, the less leeway you may have."

The data from Harvest 2005, 2006 and 2007 shows that the majority of oilseed rape fields were sown in late August to early September, but there was considerable variation even at this optimum drilling timing. So the variability is not just down to sowing date, but more to do with establishment and subsequent management throughout the crop's life, Nick Myers explains.

Seedbed conditions and subsequent management of slugs and pigeons are more important than actual drilling dates, he says.

"Early establishment of rape is critical to its success and this year with late sowings even more so. This means that growers must try to get as good a seedbed as they can and choose a variety that shows good early vigour."

In trials carried out by Dalgety/Masstock at Throws Farm on behalf of Monsanto, the drop off in yield with late sowing dates was less with the hybrid variety Excalibur than with conventional varieties.

The trials also showed that there was no obvious response to increasing seed rate when sowing was delayed, although these trials were established in ideal conditions and so not directly comparable with the conditions being experienced this year.

"Once the crop is in, growers should concentrate on removing early weed competition. This year is more suited to post-emergence weed control, but it should still be early when weeds are small."

Hopefully, this analysis of data from a large number of fields in England offers some reassurance and encouragement to growers that they can continue with oilseed rape drilling at least until the end of September. Growers in the North and in Scotland may find that they have less of a drilling window to go for, however, Nick Myers concludes.