

4cast Regional Farm Meetings Organised



The first series of regional 4cast farm days is now being organised to give ProCam customers across the country an opportunity to get the latest farm management and technical updates from the new predictive agronomy system launched at Cereals 2004.

As well as a harvest review, weed and disease control strategies for Autumn 2004 and new information on the rotational implications of MTR/CAP reform will be under the spotlight.

"4cast is an important new agronomic system that combines all that we know about trends and issues in crop production over the last ten years and enables us to interpret these in a way that helps determine the best management decisions for the future," ProCam Group Technical Director David Ellerton explains.

"It is wholly unique information and available exclusively to ProCam customers. And unlike conventional trials-based advisory information, 4cast is based on real world results accumulated over a number of years and in all manner of growing conditions."

At the heart of the 4cast system is the UK's largest database of crop production results and information which is kept constantly updated. This is allied to computer software that is able to process the results in such a way as to give likely outcomes to a number of management scenarios.

"This is not a replacement for on-farm

agronomic advice but rather a support system for it that makes it even more effective," David Ellerton continues.

"This year we will walk over one million acres of UK arable production and results, trends and agronomic issues resulting from these are now directly available to all ProCam agronomists and their clients."

The regional meetings this Autumn will be the first opportunity ProCam customers have to see the system in action.

"The sharing of information for the benefit of all is an important part of the 4cast philosophy - it's about empowering crop producers to make the right agronomic decisions, both now and in the future.

"We believe the power of the system will become increasingly significant as the impact of CAP reform takes hold over the next few years."

All ProCam customers will soon be receiving information on meetings being organised in their area and the subjects being covered. For more information now, please contact your ProCam Group regional company - details are on the back of this newsletter.

ProCam News

Inside...

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NIAB Open Days**

4cast on the web

Welcome to the first ProCam newsletter with information of developments with ProCam's newly launched 4cast predictive agronomy system. For more information on the system contact any of our regional companies shown on the back of this newsletter or visit... www.procam4cast.co.uk





£50,000 Margin Increase

OSR now plays an increasingly important role in the rotation at the Yorkshire farm of Michael Scholey (right) following ProCam 4cast information provided by agronomist Neil Moxon (left).

Gross margins at Wilstrop Grange Farm in Yorkshire are on track to increase by £50,000 since the adoption of ProCam technical advice supported by the 4cast agronomy system.

From a figure of £113,000 in 2001 to last year's gross margin of £141,000, budgeted figures for this year are £163,000 as a result of the more cost-effective use of inputs and optimisation of yields provided by the system.

"It's been a real eye opener," says Michael Scholey who has run the 500 acre arable unit at Kirk Hammerton near York for over 20 years. The farm has been one of many that have helped develop the 4cast system prior to its national launch at Cereals 2004.

"The ability to see what the best growers in the UK are doing and then put this into action with specialist local knowledge from our ProCam agronomist, has quite literally changed the way we farm."

"In terms of benchmarking, it's also showed us that some of the best production units are based in the North with margins to rival the best of them!"

The impact of 4cast has been felt across many areas including seed rates, fertiliser regimes and cropping plans as well as insecticide, fungicide and herbicide policies. The farm's new rotational plan is a good example of the system in action.

"We've sat down with our ProCam agronomist Neil Moxon, and been able to look at individual crop profitability over the last 10 years and this prompted us to ask serious questions about beans in the rotation. We were then able to analyse our own costs and margins and as a result have now dropped beans from the rotation.

"The ability to see what the best growers in the UK are doing and then put this into action with specialist local knowledge from our ProCam agronomist has quite literally changed the way we farm."

Winter Wheat and 250 acres of OSR and we will use a simple 1:1 rotation in the future because that is what 4cast shows is the most consistently profitable combination."

The system also facilitates Michael's use of variable rate fertiliser application through soil testing and mapping which can then be used to apply the most economic levels of P + K across the farm.

"In this day and age, the quality of technical advice is the difference between making money and going under. ProCam 4cast is now an essential part of our management."

Driving down costs

A key feature of the 4cast system is that it can calculate production costs down to pennies and predict the effects of management decisions on margins with surprising accuracy, says ProCam agronomist Neil Moxon.

"Michael and I can work out costs across all management areas and then compare these with the best producers in the UK to further fine-tune the decisions we make. Over the last two years, the predictions of outcome have been within 5% of the actuals we achieve."

Michael's farm has actually staged several farm meetings to spread the word about cost management and other key issues to local arable producers.

"At the heart of the 4cast system is the collation of information from arable units all over the country, the processing of this to draw out the best management options and



▲ Neil Moxon

then the communication of this to all ProCam users," Neil says.

"We've organised a lot of meetings and covered a lot of subjects including cost management stewardship schemes and varietal choice. The next meeting in Autumn will feature a national review of harvest and a look at modulation - we're expecting about 50 - 60 local farmers."

Varieties were not the only thing to come under the spotlight at two Open Days organised by ProCam at NIAB. Crop production decisions for 2005 in light of new information from the 4cast system and impending implications of CAP Reform were also on the agenda.

2005 Blackgrass Threat Grows

2005 could be the year of a major Blackgrass resurgence unless crop producers plan their weed control policies very carefully, warns ProCam Technical Director Dr. David Ellerton.

Speaking at the Procam 4cast Open Day at NIAB, Dr. Ellerton said the twin perils of increasing herbicide resistance and growers trying to take short cuts in weed control policy were potentially creating a real threat for next year.

Accessing crop records stretching back to 1979 through ProCam's 4cast predictive agronomy system, he said whilst the number of active ingredients now available for weed control had grown from 22 to 35 over the last 25 years, herbicide resistance had escalated rapidly in the last five years.

"With herbicide sales reaching a peak in 1996, our annual usage is now back to similar levels of 20 years ago but the most worrying



▲ A group of arable farmers inspect the latest varieties and the effects of seed treatments at the ProCam NIAB Open Days 2004.

feature is growing herbicide resistance. Even the mainstay chemical groups such as SUs and Fops are susceptible.

"We now have a situation where 50% of the most competitive weeds are showing significant signs of resistance," he explained. "With Mayweed now showing signs of resistance,

"We now have a situation where 50% of the most competitive weeds are now showing significant signs of resistance."

we have 6 out of the 12 most injurious weed species with significant resistance - and it's growing."

In areas of high risk, both appropriate pre-drilling and pre-emergence treatments are critical and growers should practice a combination of both cultural and chemical controls within a field specific policy.

"Our 4cast data consistently shows that crop yield response to herbicide input is flat, so unlike fungicides there is no yield advantage to using more than you have to. The herbicide rule is use as much as necessary but as little as possible."

The top 25% of producers by crop yield and margin in fact spend on average £3/tonne on herbicides and the bottom 25% spend £6/tonne.

"The message is clear," Dr. Ellerton says. "Stay on top of your herbicide policy, don't miss critical timings and don't try and cut back on dose rate - it will only cost more in the long run as our data clearly shows."

Crop Rotation Caution in 2005

The loss of Area Aid will have a far greater impact on choice of crop in 2005 than many people imagine and growers really need to get to grip with their rotations in light of this, warns ProCam technical agronomist Nick Myers.

Speaking at the Procam 4cast Open Days, Nick Myers said removing Area Aid payments from gross margin results for all crops over since the late 80's had highlighted the vulnerability of some key crops in the rotation.

"There might be sound agronomic reasons why certain break crops need to be grown, but the profitability of many will be seriously suspect in the future," he said.

"Our 4cast data for the last 5 years shows first Wheat is the most profitable and consistently performing crop by some margin and the best performing break crop is Winter OSR."

Using the ProCam data with Area Aid removed shows the average gross margin for first Wheat in 2003 being £464/ha and that for second and third Wheats being £375/ha.

Furthermore, the top 25% of producers achieved margins without Area Aid of £612/ha for first Wheat and £522/ha for second and third Wheats - nearly 32% higher on first Wheats than the average.

The top 25% of producers also achieved margins without Area Aid of £515/ha for Winter OSR compared with an average £364/ha. No other break crop came close to these levels of profitability.

"There may be reasons such as weed control and spreading workload that suggest other regimes, but if you can, Winter Wheat and Winter OSR is the most profitable combination," Nick Myers said.

"Fixed costs too need careful management. Establishment costs make up 40% of fixed costs on average so now might be the time to look at reduced tillage options as well."

4-cast on the Web

As well as accessing 4cast information through one-to-one consultation with your agronomist and through our series of regional meetings throughout the year, you can get the latest information on the system from the new ProCam 4cast website.

As well as downloading technical updates, details of upcoming regional events and the latest news, you can also use the site to arrange appointments with your agronomist.

The site is regularly updated, so for the latest 4cast news visit...

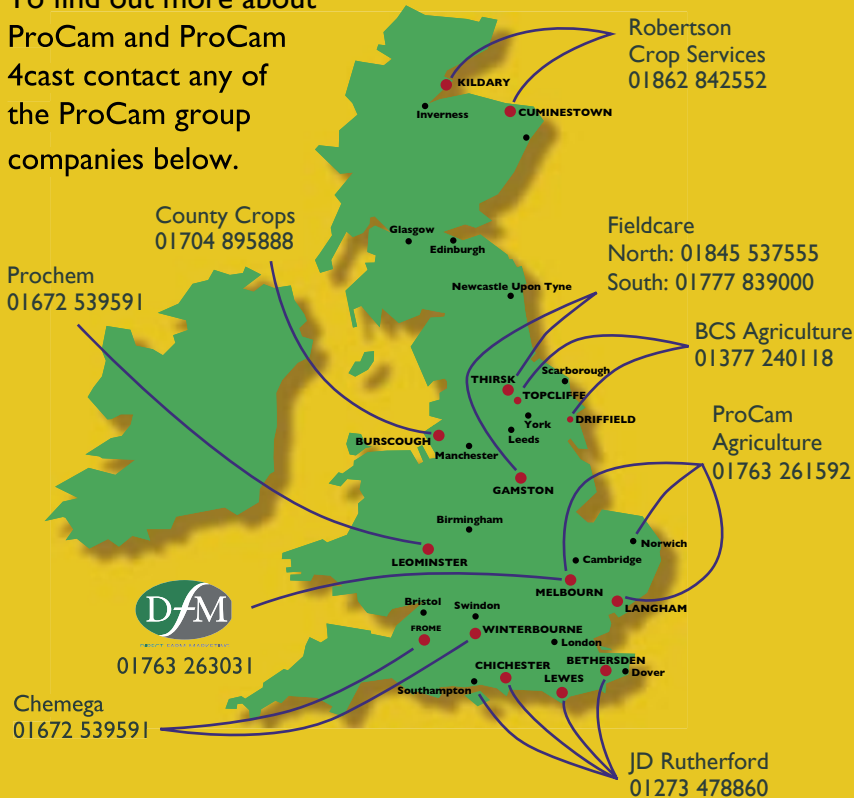
www.procam4cast.co.uk



Did you know?

- **ProCam now employs more professional agronomists walking more acres than any other organisation in the UK.**
- **In 2004, ProCam agronomists will walk over one million acres of arable land.**
- **The 4cast database is made up of 10 years of results and covers all manner of varieties, crop management regimes and growing conditions.**

To find out more about ProCam and ProCam 4cast contact any of the ProCam group companies below.



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