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PRESS NEWS

MINIMUM TILLAGE TREND REVERSES

The trend towards minimal cultivation methods could be slowing, according to new data from crop protection specialists ProCam Ltd.

Figures from ProCam's 4cast agronomy system show in 2000 only 17% of winter wheat fields were established using non-plough methods but this steadily rose to 46% in 2004. Last year the amount dropped back to 44%, the latest figures show.

In the top 25% of producers by margin, however, minimum tillage is still used in over 60% of wheat fields but ProCam's technical agronomist Nick Myres expects this to fall too over the next three years.

"Producers have been striving to reduce their fixed costs over recent years and one of the most effective ways has been to use minimal cultivation methods. The tightening financial situation, however, is now slowing investment in machinery and the additional costs of herbicides necessary, is possibly making people think again."

Over the last 5 years, 4cast shows on average an extra £10/ha being spent on herbicides in crops drilled into minimum tillage seedbeds compared with traditionally cultivated ones, he says.

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“The data also shows some first wheats, especially those on heavy soils, now have more herbicide spent on them than second wheats, showing growers may not be taking full advantage of the break crop opportunity to reduce weed levels.”

All the major grass weeds are showing marked increases in resistance levels since 1999 with the percentage of moderately affected areas rising from 31% to 52% and serious resistance levels now seen in 29% of the country as opposed to 18% just 5 years ago, he says.

“The bottom line is that we need to achieve 97% control of Blackgrass in any year simply to stand still - any less than this and the seed burden will be worse than the previous year.

“Minimum tillage is still a valid cultivation method, but growers must accept the higher herbicide costs involved. If you are using non-plough establishment methods, you must make full use of cultural controls, adjusting sowing dates, using stale seedbeds and non-selective herbicides to reduce costs and increase overall weed control.”

Ends

PRM103

14th March 2006

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Notes to Editors

4cast is ProCam’s predictive agronomy system, utilising field results taken from one million acres of arable land, walked by ProCam’s agronomists throughout the UK.