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Tailored Cropping System Delivers Yield and Margins

ProCam’s 4-cast agronomy system helps Berkshire farm manager Mike Giffin keep within a tight spray budget, achieve optimum disease and pest control and ensure production efficiency stays within the top 25% banding for the UK.

With 1300 arable acres under his control at Shottesbrooke Farm near Maidenhead, he has worked closely with Rutherfords agronomist Russell Kershaw to develop a tailored cropping system that delivers both yields and margins.

“We like to keep things as simple as we can,” Mike explains. “A few varieties, straightforward management and a fairly traditional approach to cropping but always with the focus on optimising returns from the resources we have.”

Those resources these days are principally 1550 acres of grade 2 Berkshire countryside, two tractor drivers, a range of high-output equipment and the full support of owner Bartholomew Smith.

“It’s an increasingly technical challenge to move ourselves forward and this is where Russell and the 4-cast system are absolutely invaluable in ensuring we have the information on hand to make the right decisions not just in terms of planning for the future but also on a day by day basis.”

Wheat is the mainstay

of the system with 600 acres of predominantly first wheat being grown. Winter OSR accounts for nearly 200 acres with Spring sown OSR – a one-off for this year - taking up a further 136 acres. Oats and Peas split roughly equally make up the rest of the cropping.

“We aim to keep a firm grip on costs and achieve this by setting a spray budget of £50k for the whole farm or roughly £46/acre on average and it’s Russell’s job to manage that budget the best way he sees fit,” Mike explains.

“We use the framework of Integrated Crop Management and only spray where necessary,” Russell Kershaw explains. “If it’s not going to effect yield or have a detrimental effect on future crops, we leave it alone.”

Principal weed problems on the farm are blackgrass and ryegrass which are usually treated pre-emergence with Crystal followed up by Atlantis post-emergence.

Last year despite the abundance of Orange Blossom Midge, Dursban was not used and the farm’s close proximity to the urban fringe of Maidenhead adds further sensitivity to the issue of when to spray.

“We tend to treat for eyespot at T0 and add a growth regulator then but everything else is on a prescriptive basis,” Russell explains.

All crop events are put into the 4-cast system and the information it contains can be drawn up at anytime to help with management decisions based on both information from the individual farm and that from the national picture.

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“For example, if we need to ascertain which fungicides are working best on certain varieties we can look back through several year’s data to focus in on the best solution. We can also ascertain the cost to benefit relationship of treatments”

Mike Giffin says the ProCam approach is constantly helping them appraise the best way forward for the future.

“We’re looking at ways we can reduce costs without affecting yields and minimal tillage is certainly something we will be aiming to do more of in the future.

“We are also going to be pursuing the Entry Level Scheme this year and the data already contained within the 4-cast system will certainly make this an easier task for us.”



Mike Giffin (left) with Agronomist Russell Kershaw