

## Entry Level Scheme and Management Decisions Simplified

“We’ll be guided by 4cast as to what we should be looking at in the future but I think we’ll definitely be going for the Entry Level Scheme in addition to fine tuning the approach we have developed over the years.”

ProCam’s 4 cast agronomy management approach is helping South East arable producer Will Hecks not only benefit from more accurate crop management information but its also making application for the Entry Level Scheme a more simple process than feared.

“These are tough times for arable producers and we’re all finding our way through to identifying the best way forward in the future,” Will Hecks says. “Whatever the future holds, though, having access to the best management information and an understanding of what is profitable and what is not, will be the best competitive advantage we can have.”

Will’s thinking is very much to keep farming as much land as possible and the opportunity of more land would be one he would jump at although he admits, the impact of the Single Farm Payment will probably be a major learning curve over the next few years.

“Our approach has always been to know as much as we can about our operation and the overall environment we operate in and that’s why the ProCam approach is so important to us.”

A mixed farming enterprise of 2500 acres trading as H. J. Hecks and Son, Will’s business has a 150-strong milking herd, 200 head of

beef and 1500 breeding ewes as well as 1250 acres in arable production.

Cropping plan devised with agronomist Russell Kershaw of Rutherfords - a ProCam Group company - using the 4-cast system is equally varied featuring 640 acres of Wheat,

220 acres of OSR, 200 acres of Spring Barley, 85 acres of Winter Oats and 80 acres of Maize.

“We’re on land ranging from chalk to heavy clay so our cropping is always a bit of a challenge, but wheat achieves our biggest gross margin and 4-cast backs that up so we focus on that as much as possible, even putting a second wheat ahead of OSR every other year. That’s just the way it is here.”

That said, around 80% of the wheat is first Wheat with target yields of around 3.7t/acre with the remainder down as second Wheats to the variety Soissons with a yield expectation of 3.4t/acre. OSR is Winner on the loamy clay land and Recital on the sand with a target yield of 1.5tonnes/acre.

On the agronomy front, blackgrass is a serious problem usually addressed by Atlantis with some Crystal pre-emergence. Blackgrass in Oats is the biggest problem, Will says.

Take-all has been an issue in recent years particularly on marginal land and with first Wheats after Oats. Eyespot has also been a problem in the Soissons. In recent years, the ProCam approach has kept total spray costs to around £42/acre.

As for the future, cropping, agronomic inputs and CAP Reform are all inextricably linked and some difficult decisions lie ahead.

“We’ll be guided by Russell as to what we should be looking at in the future but I think we’ll definitely be going for the Entry Level Scheme in addition to fine tuning the approach we have developed over the years.”

“I love farming and if we could get more land we would definitely go for it. Non-farming is just not an option for us – even if we wanted to the figures just don’t stack up.

ProCam’s analysis of what fellow top 25% arable producers are doing is always of interest, Will says, and there’s always things you can learn from others through 4-cast.

“I think we can make improvements to our OSR management and we’ll probably try and reduce fixed costs. We plough all the land for second wheats and use minimum tillage for the first Wheats after OSR and we can probably use this more.”



Will Hecks and agronomist Russel Kershaw (inset)