



“ There have been good crops, bad crops and indifferent ones. ”

## Harvest review

# A season in review

**As another harvest draws to a close it's not only worth looking back at the past year, but also casting forward to what's ahead. CPM assesses the results while considering the potential for 2024/25.**

*By Melanie Jenkins*

**This season has presented challenging conditions for growers with talk circulating about whether the wet autumns and dry springs will become the norm, but there are still positives and key lessons to take away, say experts.**

Although irregular establishment may explain the variability in wheat yields seen this harvest, Hutchinsons' Neil Watson observes that there are a number of other lessons emerging which could help to clarify.

“What's most evident so far this harvest is the significant variability in yield with some crops performing well considering the circumstances, while others have barely reached half their potential – and occasionally within the same field,” he says.

“The trend seems to be better on freer draining soils which have maintained their yield capabilities, albeit with no record yields. Conversely, the

heavier and poorer structured soils have seen their potential plummet.”

So much so, Neil believes soil drainage and root development to be the more significant issues. “The ratio of 20:1, the final above ground biomass production to below ground root production tells you everything. If you hinder root development, the knock-on effect on biomass will be all too evident. The effects of temporary root drowning were not only limited to the winter – in some parts of the country heavy rain late on in the season, just as the crop approached ripening, caused premature senescence.”

### Spring challenges

This lack of biomass was all too apparent from early spring onwards, where wet soils impeded uptake of nitrogen at a vital stage, while the lack of sunshine has significantly limited biomass production, particularly early in the season at the construction phase, he says. “The latter stages of the season didn't help with grain fill either, subsequently bushel weights have suffered. Elevated temperatures towards the end of the growing season also meant accelerated leaf aging leading to negative effects in the grain filling phase.”

However, he feels that in general, the lower temperatures through most of the critical spring/summer growth period helped reduce stress on crops.

Neil also believes that blackgrass control, or lack of it, will have impacted yield. “Not because of poor residual control in the

autumn, quite the contrary, but because the wet spring surviving plants were able to negate the effects of the autumn residuals.”

Disease played a key part in most areas as well, he notes. “Septoria pressure was high in the early part of the season, continuing through the critical months of April and May. The early drilled crops were at the greatest risk with many growers struggling to keep leaf two clean.

“Both yellow and brown rusts were a major risk in susceptible varieties this season – once in the base of the crop, fungicide programmes struggled to hold the disease at bay beyond three weeks,” says Neil. “And fusarium and ergot were more



*Hutchinsons' Neil Watson notes that some wheat crops have performing well considering the circumstances, while others have barely reached half their potential.*

# WORLD CHAMPION

*THE WHEAT TO BEAT*



*THE HIGHEST  
YIELDING WHEAT  
IN THE WORLD\**

Very  
high

Resistance to  
Septoria tritici

## DSV CHAMPION GROUP 4 – HARD

The ultimate barn filler with **list topping** yields  
Orange blossom midge resistance  
Robust resistance genetics against yellow rust  
The **highest AHDB classification** for Septoria tritici (very high)



Innovation for  
your growth

[dsv-uk.co.uk](https://dsv-uk.co.uk)

\* The highest wheat yield is 17.95 tonnes/ha (39572.97 lbs/ha) and was harvested from 8.2920 ha (20.49 acres) by Tim Lamyman (UK) in Louth, Lincolnshire, UK, on 10 August 2022. Data from Guinness World Records.

► prevalent this year than most, primarily because of a wet flowering period.”

He also believes that partly because the wet soils delayed applications, BYDV was more common among winter than spring crops this season. “The wet winter didn’t help with take-all in cereals this year either, it’s even shown through in first cereals.”

“When you consider all of the issues that the season has thrown at crops, it’s no wonder we’re seeing a range of yields across farms and even fields,” he adds.

But while variability appears to be the theme of this harvest, ProCam’s Lee Harker has observed a number of standout varieties this season. “LG Beowulf has performed very well in its first season, while Champion has also stone out with some excellent yields and KWS Dawsum doesn’t appear to be letting anyone down.”

“Bamford is another really good variety and there’s still plenty of seed around. I think a number of growers may have passed it up because it’s a Group 3, but it’s almost worth forgetting this. Bamford is simply a very high yielding, good wheat that’s suitable for most growers and if they can get a premium on it, that’s just a bonus.”

It’s not a dissimilar picture when it comes to barley, with Lee noting that variability is again the key take-home from this year’s harvest. “There have been good crops, bad crops and indifferent ones,” he says. “Variability has been evident in the yields, quality and specific weights we’ve seen.”

A lot of crops have produced below par yields, with reports coming in that some conventional varieties have delivered noticeably thin grains. “Although there are a few conventional varieties which have



Variability has been evident in barley yields, quality and specific weights, according to ProCam’s Lee Harker.

## Golden wheat

Northamptonshire grower Andrew Pitts’ first experience with new quality wheat RGT Goldfinch has gone very well this year and he now has plans to grow it commercially.

“We’ve had a terrific time with it,” he says. “It’s produced high yields and great milling quality, it’s resistant to BYDV and orange wheat blossom midge and has the best disease resistance profile out there. It’s ticked all of the boxes in what’s been a very difficult year.”

The 40ha seed crop was direct-drilled at the end of September after peas on medium-bodied land at The Grange, Mears Ashby. “Goldfinch looked good from the outset and tillered prolifically,” says Andrew. “And it survived the really wet autumn and spring very well.”

“The field is actually our most lodging-prone area, so this was a tremendous test for Goldfinch. Of the area we planted, only 0.4ha on the most exposed steepest slope leaned, but it remained easy to harvest.”

The variety was easy to combine thanks to its short straw and good standing, and was a couple of days earlier than the farm’s Skyfall, he adds. It averaged 10.1 t/ha and surpassed full milling specification, with a specific weight of 76kg/hl, a Hagberg of 350 and 13.1-13.7% protein across the board.

“This year especially, that’s a really good performance,” says Andrew. “The thing that thrills me most of all is the protein, in



RGT Goldfinch has performed well on one Northampton farm, achieving 10.1t/ha and making full milling spec.

a year when everything else is struggling. To make full milling spec in a difficult season is a very good sign to me.”

Goldfinch yielded about 0.5t/ha less than the farm’s Skyfall, but its better protein level made all the difference, he comments. “Skyfall achieved 12.6 to 12.9%, which was pretty good this year, and overall it put in a terrific performance. But Goldfinch secured a £600-£650/ha premium for making full spec milling and it was £50-60/ha cheaper to grow as we used more fungicide on Skyfall.”

“We’ll certainly look at Goldfinch commercially this coming season and we’ll have a lot more double-break ground in 2025/26, so I imagine we’ll be growing plenty more pre-basic seed then,” he concludes.

caught up with hybrids in terms of yield, the hybrids have definitely performed more consistently over the past few years.”

### Grain quality

Hybrids have also improved in terms of grain quality. “For example, LG Canyon has a very strong specific weight – only second to LG Caravelle on the current AHDB Recommended List – which is a really good selling point.”

Caravelle, LG Capitol and KWS Tardis have been the best performing conventional varieties, according to Lee. “Caravelle has looked very good and consistent, so I think that’ll be very popular this year, plus there’s plenty of seed available. Capitol has almost gone under the radar a little but it’s on a footing with Caravelle and Tardis is selling well again.”

After last year’s disastrous drilling conditions, the assumption is a lot of growers will have elected to drill early this time round, says Lee.

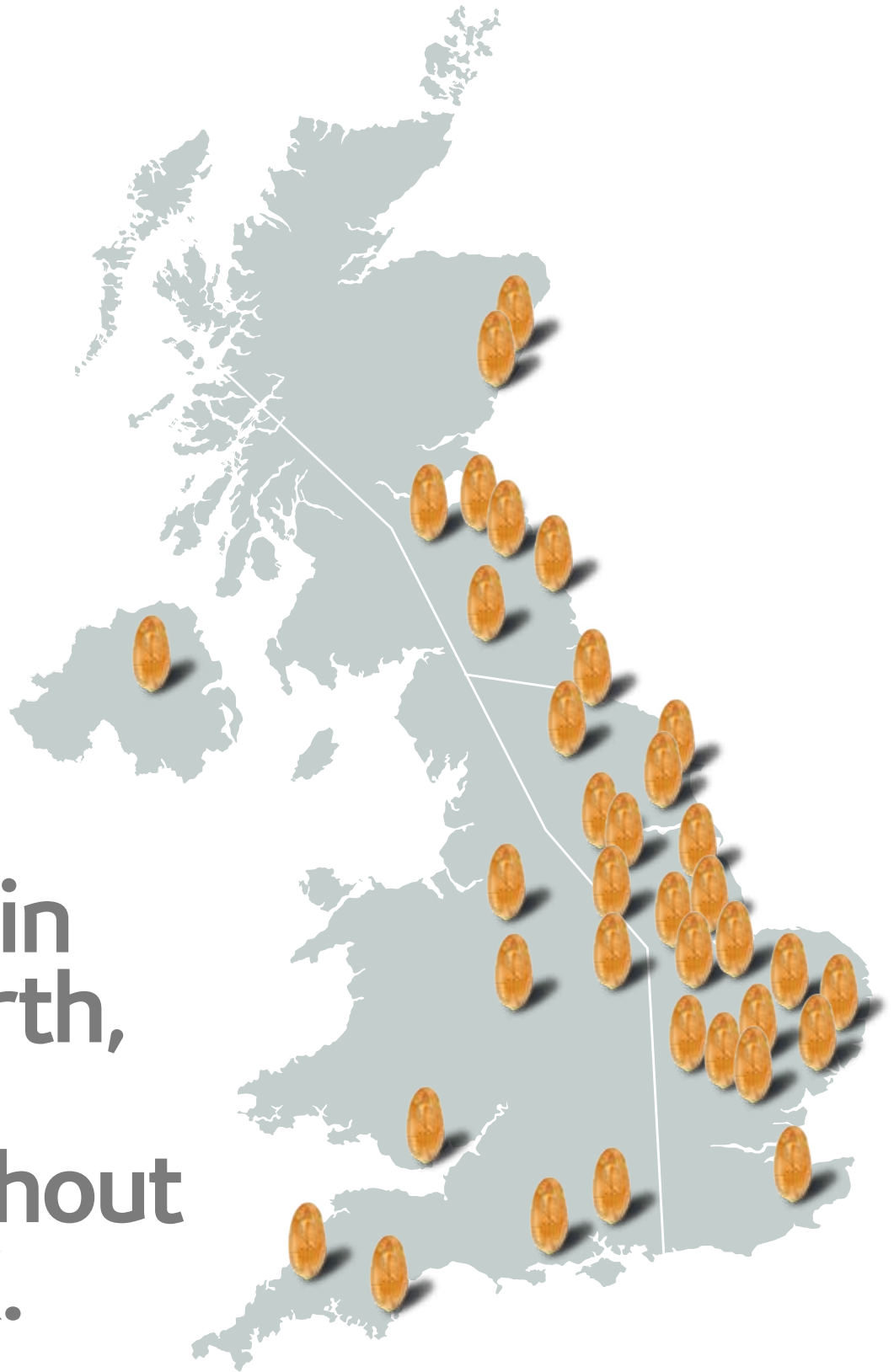
Despite this, he highlights that the

barley area is predicted to fall this coming season. “The end prices aren’t great – we’re seeing wheat at about £180/t and barley usually trades around £20/t below this. Barley plantings are also linked to the oilseed rape area due to it being such a good entry for it, and with growers turning away from this break crop the fall in barley goes hand-in-hand.”

“But should we see a strong OSR crop this autumn, it’s good to remember that barley will open the door to planting it next year. We tend to farm based on the year we’ve just had, but really we should be farming for the year or more ahead.”

Lee also points out that hybrid barley is a suitable option for those looking at whole cropping. “There are issues with the lack of available forage and we’re seeing maize crops that haven’t had enough sun just not delivering. But if you plant hybrid barley, you have the flexibility of deciding what to do with it later down the line, whether that’s taking it through to harvest or whole cropping it earlier in the year.”

NEW  
AHDB  
RECOMMENDED



# Excels in the north, thrives throughout the UK.

Introducing Blackstone, another outstanding AHDB Recommended winter wheat from Elsoms.

2023 trials show Blackstone to be a dependable and highly versatile variety in every corner of the UK, the perfect safeguard for the season's unpredictability. It's also the safest economic choice as it can be drilled from early September through to early spring.

- Tall, stiff and **reliable straw** that looks golden at harvest
- Yields: UK treated **103%**, untreated **87%**
- Yellow Rust **9**, Septoria **6.2** and **OWBM resistance**
- **Adaptive** to rotational, soil, regional and agronomic situations

Speak to your seed merchant today about availability.

## BLACKSTONE

Winter Wheat

**Elsoms**  
The Seed Specialists

elsoms.com   

# Harvest review



NPZ UK's Chris Guest advises growers to move away from having a 'drill by' date for oilseed rape and instead target optimal conditions.

▶ Looking at it from a different angle, hybrid barley is also the best option for grassweed competition, he adds. "It's the most competitive cereal crop for smothering weeds and this is of paramount importance if you're drilling really early, plus it could be a better option than a second wheat in this timeslot. Not all wheat varieties will be available on time for early drilling either, whereas hybrid barley is packed and ready to go."

"Then there's the straw to consider, with hybrids tending to produce more

straw than conventionals. If you're yielding 4-5t/ha of barley straw, at the current value of around £80/t, that's extra to add to the gross margin."

Lee feels that OSR is full of ups and downs and the challenge now is to persuade growers that it's still a good option. "We've only sold around half the seed that we had this time last year and ironically there's few reports of active cabbage stem flea beetle currently. I think we could only have around 230,000ha planted this year.

"What we saw at harvest was that even those crops which looked good and had apparently grown well through the season, still only achieved passable yields. Because of this some growers are taking a minimalist approach to the crop in case it suffers from CSFB and this almost sets it up to underperform. However, this is where the benefits of the breeder establishment schemes can come in handy."

NPZ UK's Chris Guest has been pleased with the results he's seen this harvest though. "Maverick has done very well – we've seen good results from official AHDB trials data, and two of our growers, Ben Cannon near Buntingford, and James Thompson near Louth, have reported that it was the highest

yielding variety on his strip trial."

But Chris admits that where CSFB, drought or waterlogging have impacted crops, this has pulled farm averages down. "Looking forward we have to move away from a 'drill by' date and instead target optimal conditions. I'm not suggesting that growers drill everything late, but to instead avoid bone dry conditions when there's been no rain for several weeks.

"In difficult years we're always more likely to hear about the bad than the good, but we're still seeing people average more than 4t/ha across decent areas, so there's very much still potential with this crop," he adds.

And there's also the inherent market opportunities presented by any commodity crop to take advantage of, says Chris. "For example, you could drill OSR now and still be marketing it in June 2026. And yes, you might have to deal with pests such as pigeons but being in the right place at the right time can yield a reward."

Lee agrees: "We consume about 2M tonnes of rapeseed oil in this country each year yet we're only producing about 1M tonnes of that requirement, plus the oil is used in all sorts of processed foods. And with the government focusing more on domestic food security, OSR still has a valuable position." ■

# Openfield™



Seed, fertiliser, grain, storage.

## The Openfield Partnership: More than just grain. Premium products and services to help get the best for your business.

We're proud to be Britain's only National grain marketing and arable inputs co-operative and we're committed to putting your needs first. Our range of innovative and flexible marketing tools are designed to help arable farmers to manage grain marketing risk and enhance their crop values.

We also provide storage facilities, a wide selection of seed varieties and the best-quality fertiliser.



Call us today to find out more:  
**01476 862 730**



## Bamford brings it home



*Despite a double whammy of tough autumn establishment conditions and high septoria pressure, Bamford has an average 11.66t/ha with overall bushel weights of 79kg/hl on one Lincolnshire farm.*

Despite a double whammy of tough autumn establishment conditions and high septoria pressure, Lincolnshire farmer Alex Jasinski was delighted with a first-time crop of Bamford, which produced an average yield of 11.66t/ha with overall bushel weights of 79kg/hl.

Alex, who's based in Ingoldsby, Lincolnshire, grows 400ha of arable crops on a mix of soils ranging from heavy blue clay to limestone brash soils. He drilled 22.5ha of Bamford on 2 October last year alongside two other winter wheats – Dawsum and Skyscraper – successfully overcoming very challenging wet autumn weather.

“It was certainly a tough start to the season. I just about managed to get our pre-emergence spray on two days after we drilled Bamford before the never-ending rain came again. Although we farm predominantly on free draining soils, the moisture levels were so excessive that I was seriously concerned about the amount of rain the new crops were taking.

“Nevertheless, Bamford survived, getting away pretty well in fields where our overall blackgrass burden isn't too bad. There were no hard frosts during winter and the crop progressed well through its early growth stages. Despite very high septoria and yellow rust pressure, Bamford remained remarkably clean all the way through to harvest.

“The crop was harvested mid-August, yielding miles ahead of our five-year farm average of 9.75t/ha for winter wheats, and early grain samples indicate a very large grain. It's certainly been our most impressive winter wheat and we'll be increasing our drilled area to 50ha this Autumn” concludes Alex.



# STAND STRONG WITH THE KING OF THE CROP



## CARRINGTON GREEN PEA

SCAN HERE  
FOR INFO



[npz-uk.com](http://npz-uk.com)

**NPZ UK - Breeding Quality**