

“There’s absolutely no reason why, if you have the opportunity, you can’t drill a variety right up until its latest safe drilling date.”

Spring cropping

As winter rolls in and some seed is still yet to meet the drill, *CPM* explores how late is too late for winter drilling and the importance of flexibility when it comes to spring cropping too.

By Charlotte Cunningham

Widening the windows

Mother Nature has played another cruel hand this autumn, making for a consecutive challenging drilling campaign for many growers. At the time of writing, a significant hectareage remains undrilled and where seed is in the ground, establishment is looking a mixed picture.

However, for those who have their heart set on autumn cropping, there may still be opportunity...

This is according to Openfield’s Duncan Durno, who says modern varieties mean drilling into the new year

is a realistic proposition, providing a sensible spring cropping plan is waiting in the wings in case the weather worsens.

“Most of the second wheats will now be drilled so the crops that still have to go in will be where people have simply not been able to get on the land, or following root and forage crops such as maize, sugar beet and potatoes,” he explains.

To stand the best chance in such a late window, Duncan advises increasing seed rates to a minimum of 400 seeds/ha.

“A high tillering variety is also important as we’ve lost some vital growing time



Openfield's Duncan Durno says modern varieties mean drilling into the new year is a realistic proposition providing a sensible spring cropping plan is waiting in the wings.

– this will give the best opportunity for crops to reach their full yield potential.”

A good forward growth habit will also be critical to make up some of that time, while also contributing towards grassweed control which can still be a problem even in later drilled crops, he adds. “This is especially the case if you can’t get pre-emulsions on because of sub-optimum soil or seedbed conditions. Ideally, they’ll still have to be applied, but in reality, you can only do what you can do.”

Keeping the faith

In terms of timings, Duncan says growers should have faith in the Recommended List latest sowing dates and use this as a guideline to decide on how late is too late to drill.

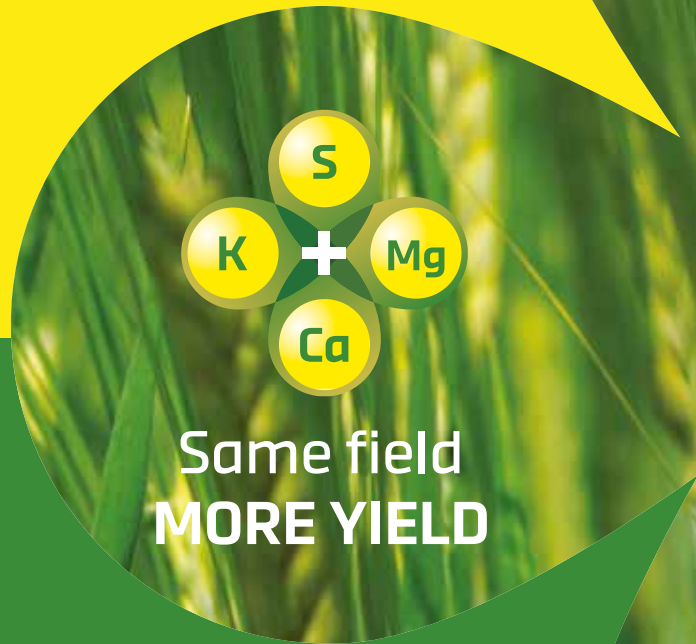
“There’s absolutely no reason why, if you have the opportunity, you can’t drill a variety right up until its latest safe drilling date,” he adds. “Being flexible about cultivations helps and these should be undertaken based on what the condition of the soil is. Like any crop,

late-drilled wheat benefits from good seed-to-soil contact and a firm-ish consolidated seedbed, but this could be difficult.

“Depending on conditions, the best establishment method could be anything from ploughing to direct drilling. Just look at soil conditions at the appropriate point in time, consider the options and be prepared to be flexible with your approach.”

Looking specifically at which varieties might fare best in the latest windows, Duncan points out DSV Champion as a good example of a modern variety with all the credentials required for a reliable late driller. He says it’s proven its value in this slot – particularly during the past year.

“High tillering, good forward growth and a strong disease resistance package come into play even more with later drilling and Champion scores well on all those points. That core resilience means there could also be opportunities to save some money on fungicides later in the season, but you do



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DSV's Sarah Hawthorne says Champion can in fact be drilled safely well past the new year, with the latest 'safe' date in mid-February.

► have to be careful with later drilled crops. You don't want to do anything that could check growth," comments Duncan.

"Champion's early maturity is no bad thing, as is its OWBM resistance. If you have different varieties on farm all with different flowering dates, things can get out of sync from a disease control perspective, so OWBM resistance on the later drilled crops could be beneficial."

DSV's Sarah Hawthorne adds that Champion can in fact be drilled safely well past the new year. "Late-drilled wheats require that 'get up and go' both in the winter and the spring combined with strong disease resistance, which is often a good indication of their overall stamina and resistance.

"Drilled before 25 September, Champion has a yield of 107% of controls according to the 2024/25 RL, and this drops by just 1% to 106% for crops drilled after 5 November; the latest safe drilling date is mid-February.

"Furthermore, it has an outstanding combination of robust disease resistance

and high yield potential and currently holds the Guinness World Record for the highest wheat yield at 17.96t/ha while also being the top-yielding variety in the 2024 AHDB harvest results."

Oxford option

Another option from the DSV stable with similar attributes to Champion is DSV Oxford. "The latest recommended sowing date is the end of January; you have minimal yield loss when drilled after 1 November compared with earlier plus you have similar septoria and yellow rust resistance," explains Sarah. "Like Champion, Oxford also has good eyespot resistance which is important in a second wheat."

Breeder KWS is another advocate for pushing varieties to their latest date when necessary. The firm's Olivia Bacon highlights KWS Dawsum as one which offers rotational flexibility and as such, can help growers choose conditions that suit drilling best without too much concern over final yield potential, provided they remain within the RL's latest

drilling recommendations.

“Dawsum has been proven to deliver high yields across the rotation with a 2024/25 RL yield of 103% in both the mainstream and late sown slots,” she explains. “With a latest safe sowing date on the RL of end of January, I don’t think you have to worry too much whether you drill Dawsum at the back end or into the new year. “Don’t worry either if it looks slow to establish, it will get away quickly in spring.”

“In fact, last year we saw crops of Dawsum drilled in January doing almost as well as those sown early the previous autumn.”

This late drilling performance is underpinned by a robust disease resistance package including a 6.3 for septoria and 9 for yellow rust, which delivers an untreated yield of 91%, second only to KWS Extase on the RL, she points out. “It’s a highly resilient variety plus with a high specific weight of 79.9kg/hl, there’s a lot

of room to play with before it starts dropping down below minimum standard for feed of around 72kg/hl.

“KWS Cranium is another great late drilling option with an RL yield of 104% in the later slot and a latest safe drilling date of mid-February.”

Switching to spring

If the season gets to a point where the final drilling date is looming and crops still aren’t in the ground, Duncan says this is the time to switch to spring varieties. “It’s a good idea to put provisional plans in place with your seed supplier in case things don’t work out as anticipated so there’s a backstop of spring seed in place should you require it.

“The last thing you want to do is think about spring options when you’ve reached the end of the winter wheat drilling window, but by the time you reach mid- to late-February, you should really consider moving over to spring crops.”



KWS’ Olivia Bacon highlights KWS Dawsum as a variety which offers rotational flexibility and as such, can help growers choose conditions that suit drilling best without too much concern over final yield potential.

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Agrii Throws Farm trial data (Harvest 2023)

Variety	Mildew(1-9)	Yellow rust (1-9)	Brown rust (1-9)	Septoria (1-9)	Height (cm)	Lodging (with PGR)
Everlong	8	7	7	6	79	(19)
Cochise	8	4	8	6	77	(2)
KWS Alcium	8	7	6	7	84	(3)
WPB Mylo	8	9	8	7	74	(1)
Escape	8	8	5	6	72	(1)

Source: Cope Seeds

- ▶ And it's not just later sown winter varieties that are piquing interest – spring alternatives with wider windows are experiencing increased interest too, according to Cope Seeds.

With a recommended sowing date spanning into April, managing director Gemma Clarke says the firm's variety Everlong continues to impress both on farm and in trials. "It's clean, easy to manage, and produces the boldest grain of any spring wheat," she highlights.

Everlong on-farm

Among the farmers who've benefited from this wider window is Lincolnshire grower, Colin Chappell, who planted Everlong earlier this year after the wettest winter he'd ever seen on farm.

"By 10 April 2024, 85% of crops still had to be drilled due to a succession of storms kicked off by Babet in October 2023," he says. "We wanted five or six days clear of rainfall and didn't get that until April.

"Much of the cropping area was in standing water until that point – it was a terrible year. I had to re-plant 35ha of winter wheat for Warburtons, and one field three times, after it was flooded out twice during the winter.

"Many farmers were planting spring barley following the wet winter and due to my uncertainty about the resulting barley price, I opted for an alternative spring wheat, grown as a seed crop for Cope," he explains.

Colin planted 15.5ha of the variety on 28 April this year and says he was pleased with the result. "Everlong went well into heavy clay soils that had been flooded and were starting to clear. It felt very late to plant but the seed bounced out of the ground and was away quickly.

"In terms of nutrition, the crop received early nitrogen on the seedbed then manganese, zinc and phosphite, which was repeated, and at tillering it had a second dose



Everlong, from Cope Seeds, has fared well in both the 2024 Agrii alternative and the AHDB RL trials – with the variety claiming a top spot for both treated yield and specific weight.

of nitrogen to total 150kgN/ha.

"As the crop came through it had phosphate, zinc and a herbicide, a fungicide at tillering, and a second fungicide treatment for fusarium 4.5 weeks later due to it being a seed crop," he says.

Colin harvested Everlong on 21 September as the last crop to go through the combine; it yielded 5t/ha. "It was a high-quality crop with high specific weight of 80kg/hl and a protein level of 13.9%, which is unheard of for a Group 4 with only 150kgN," he says.

"Everlong performed well and was easy to grow, it's also a nice bold yellow colour when ripe in the field – which, after the year we had, was

some comfort. If we keep getting this unseasonal weather, alternative spring wheats will be in demand. It's a strong back-up option," he concludes.

In trials, this performance has been reflected, with Everlong faring well in both the 2024 Agrii alternative and the AHDB RL trials – claiming a top spot for both treated yield and specific weight.

In the Agrii Throws untreated spring wheat trials site (Harvest 2023), Everlong demonstrated exceptional disease resistance – achieving a yellow rust score of 1 and a brown rust score of 2 – indicating very low levels of disease compared with other varieties, where lower scores reflect better performance, concludes Gemma. ■