

Golden gains with oats



“We have a bigger market than we can supply at the moment, so there’s a real appetite for more spring naked oats.”

NIGEL PADBURY

With minds firmly on spring cropping plans, CPM speaks to experts about the advantages of growing spring oats, whether that’s naked or conventional.

By Charlotte Cunningham

While oats have perhaps typically been seen as the wallflower of the cropping world – compared with their more widely grown cereal relations – increasing demand, a lower cost of production and a myriad of agronomic advantages mean they could prove an attractive option this spring.

“The oat crop in general has been on the up for a number of years with spring oats a large part of that increase,” explains Tom Yewbrey, managing director at Senova. “A lot of farmers have been including them in the rotation as a break crop, particularly as other options like oilseed rape have fallen out of favour, which has helped to boost their popularity.

“They’ve also been beneficial in areas where winter oats have struggled with grassweed control,” he adds. “Spring crops in general offer additional opportunities to get on top of grassweeds, and so

spring oats have maybe benefited here versus winter types.”

A continual steady demand for the crop has also aided uptake. “The outlook for the oat market in general has been very good,” says Tom. “There’s been a fairly steady increase in mill tonnage and human industrial usage for a number of years. New mills are opening up and existing mills are expanding, so the outlook for the crop in general is pretty good.”

HUSKED VS NAKED

When deciding on exactly which spring oats to grow, there are a number of considerations, he continues. “A key one will be whether you want to grow husked varieties or naked types.”

Naked oats often offer a premium over their traditional counterparts, but Tom says securing a contract is the fundamental first step. “It’s all about looking at what contracts are out there.”

Premium Crops’ Nigel Padbury says

there’s both farmer and market demand for naked oats in particular. “Naked oats have all the agronomic benefits of standard oats – they’re the same species, just without the husk around the grain. But with our naked oats specifically, we have a bigger market than we can supply at the moment, so there’s a real appetite for more to be grown.”

That said, Nigel concurs with Tom and says ensuring a contract is in place before



More favourable option

Senova’s Tom Yewbrey says a lot of farmers are now using spring oats as a break crop as other options, like oilseed rape, have fallen out of favour.



Appetite for growth

Premium Crops' Nigel Padbury says with naked oats specifically, the firm has a bigger market than they can currently supply, so there's a real appetite for more to be grown.

putting seed in the ground is essential. "It's unwise with any bespoke crops to simply try and find a market at the end. Contracts control the flow of material into the marketplace and as a result, usually ensure farmers get a better price."

YIELD OUTPUTS

Delving deeper into the market opportunities, Nigel explains that while naked oats are slightly lower yielding than husked – around 15-20% – primarily due to the husk removal weight, all of the Premium Crops contracts at the moment are based on the wheat futures price plus £45 premium. "Growers have the option to lock their price in at any time, too. We argue the price is more than competitive compared with conventional oats. We have an endless market at the moment, our big buyers are certainly saying they'll take as much as we can give them.

"Because we have a relatively narrow end market, and they're quite keen to take them, we also tend to find that naked oats have a better price stability than conventional oats in the marketplace," he continues. "So the price doesn't move that much which is helpful for growers to know when deciding on cropping plans and factoring in potential cashflow."

When it comes to specific varieties, Tom says Lennon – from the Senova stable – is a trusted naked oat option for growers. "It's been on the market for a number of years and is well accepted by the mills now; it has a good seed size

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Record-breaking oat yields in Lincolnshire

Variety Merlin hit yields of more than double the national average

A Lincolnshire farmer has won gold at the 2025 Yield Enhancement Network (YEN) awards for achieving a record-breaking oat yield of 11.46 t/ha – more than double the national average.

Mark Popplewell says this has been achieved through precise nutrition coupled with the robust characteristics of the variety Merlin, from Cope Seeds. "The numbers were so high we thought the equipment was faulty," laughs Mark. "The grain tank was filling faster than even a strong wheat crop."

Perhaps surprisingly, this was the farm's first oat harvest, planting 300ha of Merlin oats in late March after a wet winter. A combination of seed treatment, growth regulators, and optimised fertiliser application helped Mark to achieve yields of up to 14t/ha in some areas, he says. "We'll definitely grow more Merlin in 2025 as it fits well in our rotation."

Gemma Clarke, managing director of Cope Seeds, highlights the importance of investing in new varieties. "Resilient seed varieties are critical as farmers face increasing challenges from climate change and unpredictable weather. We're thrilled with how Merlin

and is agronomically pretty sound.

"We do have some new varieties coming through too including Ovation which has just gone onto the spring naked oat Descriptive List. It's an early maturing variety with a very high specific weight and we're looking to start production and move this into the market during the coming years."

To help growers to choose a variety, AHDB has an online selection tool for spring oat, notes Tom. This simplifies the Recommended List and Descriptive



Growing for gold

Lincolnshire farmer, Mark Popplewell, won gold at the 2025 Yield Enhancement Network (YEN) awards for achieving a record-breaking oat yield of 11.46t/ha.

has been performing for farmers across the UK, showing its strengths across a range of different seasons. It really is a consistent and reliable variety, with huge yield potential as demonstrated by Mark," she says.

Merlin oats are accepted by all mills and key characteristics include early harvest, low screenings, high disease resistance and strong yield potential, which Gemma says should make it attractive to farmers nationwide.

"It's one of only two spring varieties on spring oat contracts. It's an early variety (-2), offers a competitive lodging score of 8, and has a high rating of 7 for mildew. It also has low screenings which is a real bonus to the mills and a good specific weight," she concludes.

List trial data to make comparisons and identify the most promising spring oats varieties for the individual farm situation.

Although it's likely many cropping plans will have already been set for this spring, Nigel says if farmers find themselves with unexpected additional spring cropping area – on the back of failed OSR crops, for example – naked oats can be drilled right up until the end of April.

"They have quite a wide sowing window – from mid-March right the way through to the end of the spring. So if there are growers coming in late into the market with failed hectareage, we have contracts available for this spring, and as it stands at the moment (mid-February), I can't see that closing in the near future." ●