**Determination delivers against resistant black-grass**

For many, autumn 2023 will be remembered as the year black-grass gained the upper hand. But for Somerset grower, Mark Doble, it marked the end of an eight-year battle with the grassweed.

Mark farms 160ha in Illminster. He grows winter wheat, oilseed rape, winter linseed, maize and potatoes.

“Back in 2016 our landlord took back two fields of grade three arable land for solar. In return, he offered 17.5 hectares of grade two arable land,” explains Mark. “It seemed like a reasonable exchange; however, these fields came with a very high black-grass population.”

Being a seed grower, it was a significant problem for Mark.

**AD crops give Mark the upper hand**

The first two years of cropping saw the acreage put into maize and wholecropped for anaerobic digestion (AD). According to Richard Guest, the local BASF Agronomy Manager, it was a wise decision.

“Maize is a good crop for gaining the upper hand against black-grass,” he says. “It presents an opportunity to get multiple stale seedbeds ahead of drilling in April or May.

By then, any germinating black-grass tends to be weaker and not as prolific in its seed set.

“It also allows you to use different chemistry; it’s a useful rotational tool,” he adds.

In 2019, Mark tried to grow winter wheat, applying a robust herbicide programme but there were still big patches of the grass weed.

For harvest 2020, the hectarage was returned to maize and wheat was tried again that autumn.

**The turning point**

In an attempt to smother the black-grass, Mark grew winter barley for harvest 2022. “We rogued it that year, and didn’t find much black-grass at all,” he says.

The following year, Mark grew oilseed rape. “We choose a Clearfield variety, 1266, which enabled us to apply Cleravo, as well as Kerb Flo (propyzamide),” he explains.

**Gaining the upper hand**

This year, the field has returned to winter wheat. Mark drilled the competitive variety, Champion, on 9th October 2023.

“Drilling is always a balancing act,” acknowledges Richard. “But the effects of delaying drilling are huge; the control you can achieve with chemistry equates to delaying drilling by around four weeks.”

Less than a day after sowing the crop, Mark applied Luxinum Plus + Stomp Aqua and Hurricane (diflufenican).

For Richard, this was key – not only does it optimise the herbicide performance but reduces risk.

“Getting Luximo on at pre-emergence and using the most effective chemistry first, means that, if conditions allow, he has the option to return with follow-up treatments early post-em.”

Once again, Mark hand rogued the acreage. “Over the 17.5 ha, we found just six plants, so I’m thrilled to bits,” he says, “I would have drilled a seed crop if I’d have known!”

For Richard, Luximo® is just the final piece in the puzzle – it’s Mark’s diligence that has been the real winner.

“We’ve only got to this point because Mark has been ruthless in deploying IPM strategies and strategic with his use of chemistry.

“Luximo is not a silver-bullet,” he hastens to add. “The reason it has worked so well for Mark, is that it is part of a wider long-term IPM strategy.”

-ends-

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