

Autumn drilling window is key to top wheat yields

In the second part of our look at arable farming in Ireland, **David Jones** visits an award-winning grower just north of Dublin and also looks at the problem of controlling septoria in winter wheat

Hitting a narrow two- to three- week autumn drilling window is key to achieving high wheat yields on Thomas McGuinness' farm in Ireland before the October rains begin.

Good autumn establishment is essential in late September as crops drilled too early become overly proud, but leave it too late and it is tricky to get on the land.

The monsoon-like rains of autumn 2012 were a classic example and Mr McGuinness was relieved that his winter wheat was in the ground before the wet weather arrived.

The result was a top yield of 12.3t/ha with a farm average of 11.5/ha at harvest 2013, helped by heavy applications of mushroom compost and a history of fertility from his former dairy farm.

"Good and timely establishment was key along with organic manures," he tells *Farmers Weekly*.

That season he came second in the best potential yield category in the Adas-organised Yield Enhancement Network (Yen) competition with his 12.3t/ha crop yielding 63% of its calculated 19.6t/ha potential.

The Santiago winter wheat was sown on 25 September with his Claydon slot drill, which he says gives him the ability to sow quickly without excessive cultivations.

The wet winter and cold spring put pressure on his winter wheat, but the summer of 2013 was relatively dry and prospects improved ahead of harvest.

Mr McGuinness' Yen wheat crop was grown on his 720ha arable farm at Ballywalthera, near Dunleek, some 30 miles north of Dublin.

He grows winter wheat along

FUNGICIDE STRATEGY

T0 Azole epoxiconazole + multisite chlorothalonil

T1 SDHI bixafen + azole prothioconazole + chlorothalonil

T2 Azoles prothioconazole and tebuconazole + chlorothalonil

T3 Prothioconazole + tebuconazole

Yield – 12.3t/ha or 63% of a potential yield of 19.6t/ha, coming second to Lincolnshire's Robert Paske who achieved 69% of his 11.9t/ha potential yield

THOMAS MCGUINNESS' 2013 YEN COMPETITION CROP

Variety Santiago

Drilling date 25 September

Seed rate 160 kg/ha

Previous crop oilseed rape

Cultivations direct drilled with Claydon

Nitrogen 125kg/ha plus heavy applications of mushroom compost

IRELAND'S ARABLE SOUTH EAST



with winter and spring barley and break crops of oilseed rape, spring beans and fodder beet on his deep, fertile black soils.

"The limiting factor for yield is light intensity here and never the lack of water," he says.

A four-spray fungicide regime kept disease away, while Mr McGuinness has the capacity to cover his 280ha of wheat in two days if needed.

His independent agronomist, Seamus Shevlin, says timing is key. One plot of winter wheat which missed an early season T0 spray really suffered from disease.

"In hindsight, a T0 spray is very important for wheat which is sown before 1 October," he says.

For the future, Mr McGuinness is looking to plough less and establish more of his crops with the Claydon drill, and also use more cover crops such as spring oats and

*** A T0 spray is very important for wheat sown before 1 October**

Seamus Shevlin

Thomas McGuinness has high hopes of his Revelation wheat this season.

spring beans grazed off with sheep before spring drilling.

For harvest 2014, average yields on the farm again reached about 11.5t/ha, while for this year's harvest he has introduced the new variety Revelation for which he has high hopes of a good yield.

Read more in our Arable in Ireland series online:

Part 1: High wheat yields – why the Irish excel

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