

# Stowmarket Monitor Farm

## Meeting 14: Crop Establishment and Cover Crops

6 January 2017

Wyverstone Village Hall, Stowmarket

### Speakers:

**Brian Barker – Cover crops and Yield Club**

**Tom Bradshaw – Establishment systems**

**Tim Isaac/Paul Brown – Cover crop experiences**

**Andy Howard – Companion cropping**



**Brian Barker**  
Stowmarket Monitor Farmer

For more information, visit:  
[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/Stowmarket](http://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/Stowmarket)

## Meeting Summary – key messages

1. Cover crops have a lot of potential for; nutrient capture, building organic matter, reducing soil erosion, increasing farm biodiversity and for the farm shoot. However, there are important considerations when using a cover crop, including; disease carry over, pest bridge, yield impacts and pay back, establishment and destruction of the cover crop.
2. “Imagination is our only limiting factor” with companion cropping – huge potential for a variety of methods that can lead to less inputs, lower disease and pest pressure and higher yields.
3. Know your costs – need to maximise net margin rather than yield. Recent increases in variable costs has had an impact on risk within the business that needs to be managed.

For further information, follow the links below for AHDB guidance on:

- [Cover crop experiences](#): seven short publications feature farmers talking about their experiences using cover crops
- [AHDB Cover crop review 2016](#): A review of the benefits, optimal crop management practices, allelopathic effects and knowledge gaps associated with different cover crop species

### Stowmarket Yield Club

Join to benchmark your fields of wheat against [AHDB's Benchmark](#) and club members during the season to achieve your yield potential. Opportunity to take detailed analysis through the year at critical stages, participate in [YEN](#), soil samples and biomass and tissue analysis results. If interested, please contact Brian Barker.

## Cover Cropping at Stowmarket Monitor Farm

### Considerations from cover crop trial visit at Kiln Farm:

- establishment date (the earlier the better)
- be careful of residual DFF
- slugs (particularly when using oil radish)
- straights vs mixes (mixes preferred, 2+)
- use of frost kill potential
- rotation (aim for species that complement)
- bridge for weeds, disease and pests
- EFA rules
- date for spraying off (pre-Christmas possible)
- comparisons/Records (Brian had highest worm numbers in cover crop areas)



## Intercropping

- Many types of intercropping options including:
  - In-field variety mixtures
  - Strip intercropping
  - Relay cropping
  - Pasture cropping
  - Agroforestry
  - Companion cropping
- Companion cropping is a good option with OSR, for example an OSR, berseem clover, vetch mix.
- Companion cropping or intercropping can lead to better germination, fewer weeds, insect pests and disease plus a lower input requirement.
- Under-sowing a grass ley into a spring cereal or a legume or grass into maize is already common practice in some areas of the UK.

Needs good planning in advance and many things to consider before starting intercropping, such as cultivars, current weed pressure, label uses and restrictions.



*Example of Agroforestry – Stephen Briggs*

## Sustainable Establishment Systems

Think about running costs of primary machines used on-farm. Two examples shown below:

Machine	Hours	Cost (£/hour)
<b>Wheeled Tractor</b>	1000	58
<b>Quadtrac</b>	1000	115

- Introduce a target fuel usage for the business (l/ha)
- Design machinery policy to encourage flexibility
- Can we reduce fixed costs to enable more flexible rotations?

## Next Meetings

### Date

3 February 2017

11am at Wyverstone Village Hall, IP14 4SH

### Topic

Business Resilience

**Summer Open Day:** Friday 30 June – Location and Timings TBC

**To attend the meetings, please contact your AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Knowledge Exchange Manager:**

Teresa Meadows

[teresa.meadows@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:teresa.meadows@ahdb.org.uk) 07387 015465

**To find out more about AHDB's benchmarking tool, please contact:**

Holly Howsam

[holly.howsam@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:holly.howsam@ahdb.org.uk) 07767 001543

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