

REAPING REWARDS: IN YOUR AREA

West and Wales



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IS THERE VALUE IN VARIABLE RATE TECHNOLOGY?



Leamington farmer and new Strategic Farm host Rob Fox benefited from adjusting the amount of nutrient/seed inputs depending on the condition of the field. "Variable rate technology doesn't have to be expensive and can be very rewarding," Rob said.

Rob's variable rate journey:

- 2008: GPS on new tractor
- 2010: Variable rate P, K and seeds based on SOYL maps

- 2011: Satellite images to create N application maps
- 2017: Tractor-mounted crop scanner to control N application real time

Rob's aim was to improve his business efficiency and reduce waste, rather than trying to even out the yields.

In the first couple of years, he did one or two fields in separate blocks of land to see if the technology worked. "Now I'm at a stage where, if the variable rate technology is available, I'll use it."

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

The investment into variable rate technology can be enough to put many people off. Rob rationalised his costs over five years and over the size of the farm, working out the cost at £8.93 per hectare per year over the past five years.

Rob spreads the cost across the 720ha in his joint venture and shares the upfront cost with two other farmers. "The average cost per hectare will go down if you look

at it over the next five years, too. We won't need to buy anything else and there is still plenty of life and residual value in the kit."

Full costs can be found in the Cowbridge Agronomy 18 slides at:
cereals.ahdb.org.uk/agronomy18

SAVINGS

Using variable rate P reduced costs by £13.19 per ha per application over a typical flat rate. Rob does this every other year, giving a saving of £2,300 per year.

In the first year of using variable rates, Rob saw an increase of 0.7t/ha in winter wheat yield as a result of variable rate nitrogen and 0.8t/ha increase using varied seed rates.

The increased yields, coupled with the nutrient/seed savings, saw a net cost benefit of £6,495 per year.

Rob will continue to look at technology and nutrient use as AHDB's new Strategic Farm host.

cereals.ahdb.org.uk/strategicfarmwest

Pembrokeshire Monitor Farm

Pembrokeshire farmer Tom Rees will bring the benefits of farmer-to-farmer learning and benchmarking closer to home, as one of the newly appointed AHDB Monitor Farms. It was his involvement in the previous AHDB Monitor Farm near Cardiff that convinced him to take on the role.

He said: "I felt that the Monitor Farm, especially the benchmarking, was a really good programme and I wanted to make sure the good work continues in Wales, this time in Pembrokeshire.

"Although we're a small county of arable farmers, there are some first-class businesses here. It's our opportunity to make the most of the levy we pay."

Find out more at cereals.ahdb.org.uk/pembrokeshire

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- **Bridgnorth Monitor Farm summer meeting: 5 June 2018**
- **Strategic Farm West launch: 6 June 2018**
- **Arable Connections at ADAS open day: 19 June 2018**
- **Pembrokeshire Monitor Farm launch: 27 June 2018**
- **Hereford Monitor Farm summer meeting: 10 July 2018**