

Profitability should drive your oilseed rape growing decisions

Pay attention to your oilseed rape and remember you grow the crop to make money, farmers were reminded at a recent seminar held by United Oilseeds.

Ian Munnery, commercial manager at United Oilseeds, complained that while people know about things such as Hagberg in wheat, little attention is paid to the quality characteristics of oilseed rape. "It doesn't have the same level of commitment from farmers and the industry as do wheat and barley," he said.

Nigel Padbury, technical sales marketing manager for NK Syngenta, reminded farmers to pay attention to the right target. "Are you looking for tonnes per hectare or oil yield, which I would suggest is pounds a hectare?" he asked.

Farmers should pay more attention to oilseed rape, he said, because "managing the crop for convenience isn't going to give us big yields".

He advised farmers to quiz seed salespeople on

Chris Lyddon says OSR crops need more attention

the characteristics of the varieties they were selling. "A seed rep' who's trying to sell you a particular variety should know what its characteristics are," he said. He also suggested growers should make better use of HGCA data, reminding them that they were paying for it.

According to Ian Hamilton of Syngenta Crop Protection, many farmers could do better than the national average yield of 3.3 tonnes a hectare. "There's still a huge variation," he said. "Potentially, we could be getting seven tonnes a hectare."

FOCUS ON PROFIT

Ian Munnery recognised the supposed advantages of growing for the biofuel market, including saving the environment, farm diversification, getting into new markets and meeting the Government's renewable energy target, but he pinpointed one major reason.

"The main reason to

talk about biofuels is to make a profit," he said. But he did refer to some of the more exaggerated claims: "If you believe the press, biofuel is going to save the day and we're all going to be rich by Christmas," he said.

The Government wants more biofuel because it is the only way to cut carbon emissions from transport, said Mr Munnery, pointing out that the UK had a diesel powered transport fleet and was a net importer of diesel fuel.

"You've got to have fuel for transport, that's why the RTFO (Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation) came in," he said. "That's why the EU is interested. You can't put a nuclear car on the M4."

The problem was that Britain simply did not have the land to produce enough rapeseed to satisfy the amounts of biodiesel under discussion. With diesel usage at 22 million tonnes and rising by 5% a year and the

RTFO planned to rise to 10%, the UK would need 2.2m tonnes of vegetable oil to produce enough biofuel, he calculated.

Currently, UK farmers are growing 2m tonnes of rapeseed on 550,000ha. "You've got 900,000 tonnes of oil," he said. "That's it. Every ounce of it has already found a home in the food industry."

OIL POTENTIAL

The world has enormous potential for increased oil demand. "A lot of Brazilians and Chinese want to get fatter," said Mr Munnery. "You start doubling the oil consumption per head per year and you need a lot of oil."

He questioned the potential for rises in UK production. "DEFRA has said everybody in the UK is up by 18%," he said, and asked if any farmers present had increased their OSR area that much. In a room full of growers, only one person put their hand up.

"Peak land would be an

appropriate phrase," he said, referring to the phrase 'peak oil' which describes the idea that the world's oil consumption has passed its high point.

Rape oil also has health advantages that make it desirable as part of a healthy diet, he said. "It's low in saturates; it's healthy," he added. But, he pointed out, there is a problem with unhealthy trans fats, created as part of the hydrogenation process used with rape oil, noting that Marks & Spencer was putting more palm oil into its mix.

Mr Munnery advised cautious marketing: "Don't be greedy. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You wouldn't do that with a variety."

It might be better, he added, to take a simple approach. "If you trade a bit here and there throughout the year and your average price is no better than United Oilseeds would have paid in a pool, maybe that time would have been better used," he concluded.

Organic fertilisers fill a gap in the market

Fertiliser manufacturers are increasingly turning their attention to the expanding organic sector.

Potash Ltd has recently launched five products that have been fully certified by organic body the Soil Association.

"I speak with many organic growers and it appears to me that the scale of organic outfits is increasing in terms of size and expectations of yields and quality," says Potash's technical manager Jerry McHoul.

The raw materials used in Potash's organic products are extracted as mixed crude mineral salts from mines in Eastern Europe. They contain potassium, magnesium, sodium and sulphur.

"These nutrients are of particular value in organic systems due to their variable content and availability in manures," points out Mr McHoul.

"While nitrogen can be generated with careful use of legumes in the rotation, sulphur can't and as

such is thought to be the most important factor limiting yield on many organic farms," he adds.

The five new products launched are:

- Sulphate of Potash – a granular potash and sulphur fertiliser for use with all crops;
- Hortisul – a highly soluble powdered potash and sulphur product for hand application or foliar/fertigation use;
- Magnesia-Kainit – a potash, sodium, magnesium and sulphur fer-

tiliser particularly for grazed grassland, forage crops and fodder beet;

- Esta Kieserite – a granular magnesium and sulphur product with particular crop availability properties;
- Epsom Top – a fine grade Epsom salt product used for foliar application or fertigation to treat and prevent magnesium and/or sulphur deficiency.

The new products join Patentkali, an organic potash, magnesium and sulphur fertiliser that

Potash Ltd introduced last year.

Mr McHoul says the fertilisers have been developed and tested so they can be spread accurately through conventional fertiliser spreaders.

He believes that more organic farmers are looking for more reliable and measurable methods of applying fertilisers and expects the sector to grow in the long term as growers seek to fill markets that are currently being supplied from abroad.