



## Introduction

***As we head towards the end of 2021, what a year this has been! Covid, high grain prices and even higher fertiliser prices.***

Combine all that with product shortages and what a concerning result we come up with. Added to the mix we have Government making menacing comments about “let the polluter pay” which could well have some very serious consequences for British Agriculture. I haven’t even mentioned trade deals with Australia and New Zealand which don’t seem too much of a problem with lamb prices as good as they are, but I suspect could well be a problem a few years down the line. What we really don’t want is a high input, low output year because the consequences of that will be serious.

Here at Westbury, we have been heavily lobbying Government over the fertiliser industry, particularly the niggly problem of having the two UK AN producing plants owned by an American company. This was brought to the fore with the shortage of CO2 but of course high price N may discourage usage which could lead to a drop in yield, this could well lead to a shortage. It doesn’t take much to swing the pendulum towards shortage particularly with the vagaries of the weather, so we have been pushing for the fertiliser plants to be brought into public ownership. I suspect we will be ignored but food security is something we have taken for granted over recent years and with 66 million people on our small island you don’t want to take anything for granted.

On a lighter note, this newsletter will be delivered with our calendar which despite the aforementioned foreboding, brings hope of a new year which I sincerely hope will bring with it calmer times.

**By David Roberts**

## Grain

The grain market has been fantastically exciting over the last 6 months. The relentless rise has seen, at the time of writing, wheat in the £220s for the new year with new crop wheat having never been higher for the time of year.

We all thought the wheat rise was impressive but barley has also recovered well from last year’s lows to be £8 below wheat.

The star performer of course is OSR which is well into the £500s at the moment and keeps climbing. Where is all this going to take us? My favorite saying is “a little and often” and that is the approach I would take to selling grain. You are very lucky if you catch the top of the market so to my mind achieving a good average is the aim. I would suggest it would be sensible to cover a small amount of new crop but keep a close eye on the markets. We are always keen to have a chat here and will always give you an honest opinion on the markets so please feel free to ring. Let’s hope for a good crop growing year!

**By David Roberts**

## Seed

As November arrives it’s safe to say that seed is well and truly starting to close up. Always a very busy time in our office. With Marg, head of logistics in Westbury, we try our very best to keep our customers drills running. This year we certainly saw the benefit of not having to move seed across the country, and all went pretty smoothly.

We start to look towards the spring and even further and once again we have some very exciting varieties in the ground. We can offer all varieties of spring seed, with Spring Barley coming out of Westbury, (there may even be an advantage of using less fertiliser on Spring Crops.)

Once again KWS Dawsum has gone in with some feverish excitement of how well it will fill farm stores. In addition to this we are also adding DSV Champion to the seed stable. Champion is once again a barn filler and one that I would look at on farm. With the news that Syngenta are looking to cease seed production the time may have come to look beyond Graham and Gleam.

**By Owain Roberts**





## Agronomy

*It is that time of year when walking boots and shirt sleeves are being swapped for wellies and waterproofs.*



For the first time in three years we have had a kind drilling period. Winter Cereals and OSR have gone in perfectly. Seed beds all round have looked well. Having been on an ADAS trials day in the Summer, we have some of our own drilling date trials going on. The early drilled OSR is looking well. In fact, if the autumn remains this kind, we will be swapping from waterproof trousers to fishing waders to walk it. The later drilled OSR will move slower through the growth stages, but is seeing less of a hammering from flea beetle. The key learning from all of this is pretty simple. Consolidate the moisture and don't drill in a drought.

Even more interesting is the Soil Organic matter trial going on the field next door to the late drilled OSR, on a mixed farm, the grower very interested in embracing the modern world applied compost (to be within the new organic materials regulation.) The crop is looking well for it, the soil is obviously more friable, and so far, much better draining. We will see how we go, and give you an update in the spring.

For the first time since the autumn of 2016 the problematic blackgrass patches have been given a residual stack to get them through the winter, without me getting a red ear for ruts. Obviously where this is possible its really worth doing. Combined with some of the new Bayer chemistry for Autumn residuals, I'm quite hopeful for what the spring will bring.

**By Owain Roberts**

## Fertiliser

*The Energy Crisis is still front-page news and some articles mention how this has affected fertiliser prices. But why has fertiliser increased so much and how can we protect our businesses from the risk of rising costs?*

The cold spring of 2021 saw frosts continuing into May, meaning that central heating systems were running for longer than usual. This led to gas stocks across Europe being lower than usual going into summer. Usually, Europe has a relatively fluid agreement with Russia to replenish stocks throughout the summer, this year however this has not been the case. Whether this is because Russia is supplying China who are desperately trying to keep their faltering economy rolling or if they are trying to use energy as leverage in negotiations over Europe only time will tell. Couple this with China halting its export of urea and supplies of all major forms of synthetic nitrogen are very low globally.

What does this mean to the British farmer? On arable crops we need to look at the cost of return. On wheat this could mean reducing our application from typically 220kgN/ha to roughly 160kgN/ha.

On grassland wherever Organic sources are available such as slurry, timing and method of application is essential. Using dribble bars or injecting will ensure a greater response and reduce the need for synthetic fertiliser. Timing of bagged fertiliser is important as well, once a field is cut or grazed the greatest response is within 3-5 days as this is when the grass will be growing at its quickest and requires the most Nitrogen. For the first application in spring once we have had soil temperatures above 5°C at 10 cm for 5 days grass will start to move and this is the time to get fertiliser on to ensure earlier turn outs and bigger first cut yields.

As always if you want to run ideas past someone then David, Ed and Owain are always here to give advice and look at other options to help save money in these expensive times.

**By Ed Roberts  
Fertiliser Manager**

### G. O Davies (Westbury) Ltd

Harvest House  
Westbury  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY5 9BY

**Tel:** 01743 884 717

**Fax:** 01743 884 718

[www.godavies.co.uk](http://www.godavies.co.uk)

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