



Tillage Better Farms

By Michael Hennessy

The harvest is in full swing with some areas of the country nearing completion. Yield reports through the country are variable but on the whole growers are happy. The Teagasc tillage BETTER farmers are at various stages of completing their harvests. Although none are finished, as yet, all are happy with this year's returns and are already in the process of planning for next year's crops.

To help all growers plan for the year ahead Teagasc are holding the annual National Crops Forum in the Keadeen Hotel, Newbridge, Co Kildare on September 7th at 2pm. The forum will give growers an excellent opportunity to hear the latest market news and predictions for the coming year and talks on oilseed rape and crop margins will aid the planning process in the coming months. All are welcome.

The Crowleys in Cork

When I spoke to John Crowley before the weekend he had a small acreage of crops left to harvest which should take a couple of days and was happy with the progress so far. "It's been difficult weather wise so far this year and organising labour around the harvesting and bailing has been even more difficult" said John "but generally we have kept pace with the ripening crops" he added. The yields on the Crowley farm are close to their three year average with winter barley yielding slightly lower this year than 2010. "Spring barleys have yielded well this year with individual yields of between 3.0-3.7 t/ac but we haven't finished yet so we will have to wait to see the overall average". The Crowleys grow a large acreage of continuous wheats and John said, even though it's not all cut, the average will end up over 4t/ac. Despite the bad news in the press about straw John has made good progress in shifting barley straw to his regular customers. "We work hard at straw in good and bad years" said John. "Our regular straw buyers know what they get when they arrive in the field. Excellent quality straw in well made bales which are loaded without any delays for the drivers" added John. He maintains this type of service attracts buyers year in year out as straw buyers demand good service to keep their business competitive. However John is still pragmatic and has chopped almost half the wheaten straw as the offers he received for straw did not justify the effort compared to the benefits of incorporation. "It's a very busy time of the year without giving away a valuable product so chopping some of the straw was the best option for us" said John.

The Crowleys are putting their toe in the water with oilseed rape this year after working out the potential margins for the year ahead. The Crowleys are applying pig slurry to the ground before planting the oilseed rape with a subsoiler type machine. "We hope to get a good kick from the slurry this backend and hope it will set up the crop for as good a yield next year as people attained this year" added John.

The Williamsons in Wexford

George was cautious to reveal exact yields as there was a good bit of his harvest to go. However he was happy so far and maintains it will shift his five year average in the right direction. "Some of the yields were excellent with some fields of spring barley we had estimated would only yield two and a half tonnes returned three tonnes per acre" said George. "We haven't finished the wheat yet but yields look well up on normal" he added. "Even though it's been a very stop start type of harvest once we got started it was a dream to cut all crops as they were standing straight without a crooked straw in the field" said George. The Williamsons were exceptionally pleased with the quality of grain harvested with wheat at 77-78 kg/hl and the barleys easily passing 65-66 kg/hl. "It's been a long time since I have seen grain as well filled" said George "and the grain weighed extremely well with fully loaded trailers coming in 1 -1.5 tonnes heavier than last year" he added. "A pleasant surprise was the crop of winter oats which we decided not to plough out after the frost damage. It returned a yield of just over three tonnes" said George with a smile on his face. "We haven't harvested the spring oats which were replanted in the rest of the ground as yet, it should be an interesting comparison" George added.

Straw yields are back with some fields only giving 6-7 four by four bales but as the market is poor George isn't too upset. "It's hard to shift straw down here but I have my wheaten straw sold to the mushrooms industry" said George.

After a 2012 planning meeting with his Teagasc advisor John Pettit, George is planning to plant winter oilseed rape this year. "It will be a struggle to get all the work completed over the coming ten days but the financial margin for oilseed rape at current prices surpasses all other crops I can grow on my farm" said George. The Williamsons will plant Flash, a hybrid oilseed rape, this week at a 50-60 plants per meter squared.

The O Donoghues in Meath

It's a pleasure to talk to growers in the middle of harvest especially when harvest results are as good as this year. Joe O Donoghues crops appear to be turning out well although he has at least one third of the harvest to go. "We are happy with progress so far are and are probably a little further on than some of the growers around us" said Joe. "We started harvesting wheat at 21-22% moisture and used our batch dryer to keep things rolling. However drying has been slower than I would have expected which I am putting down to the large grain size and excellent quality" added Joe. Generally all winter wheats are performing well in different rotational positions. "Its surprising how well continuous wheat's have preformed this year but first wheat's seem to be yielding more and are more consistent with many of my neighbours". Joe said the only disappointment was one winter wheat variety "Kingdom was a disappointing compared to almost all other varieties this year. The milling variety reached the correct protein levels but let us down on yield and eventually on Hagberg falling number so we couldn't shift it as milling wheat". "JB Diego and Einstein preformed exceptionally well and will feature in our cropping plan next year" said Joe. Winter wheat straw yields are back and he described straw as brussy and has broken up more than usual during combining. The straw is being sold into the mushroom market but Joe admits the price is terrible. "We were on a tour of a mushroom plant earlier this year where we were impressed with the professionalism of the company. They impressed upon all growers their need for a quality raw material (straw) but what's disappointing is when it comes to the crunch they aren't stepping up to the plate this harvest" said Joe a little despondently.

Similar to the other BETTER farmers the O Donoghues are planting oilseed rape this year, the first time in about ten years. "At the price at the moment and the projected forward price its worth taking another look at the crop" said Joe. "We are locked into a system of continuous cereals on quite a bit of our ground and breaking the take-all cycle for one cropping year without the promise of longer term prices is difficult" said Joe. This is one of the reasons the O Donoghues will keep the acreage of oilseed rape small this year to see how it fits into their farming system.