

Three crop rule need not be an issue with the right drill

A six-metre Soladrill gives Suffolk farmer the flexibility to cope with the new system

Following last year's announcement of the controversial three crop rule from Brussels, a Newmarket based farm manager, Paul Jolland, decided it was not only time to reconsider his cropping options, but also to purchase a new drill which would enable him to widen his options on both late drilling and spring drilling.

"We had always been wheat/rape due to prices but in order to satisfy the new rules we opted for spring beans as the third crop," he says.

Farming over 250 hectares on heavy boulder clay at one of the highest points in Suffolk (120 metres above sea level) Mr Jolland decided that in changing his cropping he also needed to allow for greater flexibility on drilling dates.

"Due to our altitude our average soil temperatures often mean we can be up to two weeks behind neighbouring farms, so whatever we bought drill-wise needed to provide us with a bigger drilling window," he explains.

In September 2014, Mr Jolland purchased a six-metre



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SM1909 Soladrill from Yorkshire based Keith Rennie Machinery, which was used immediately to drill first wheat on 23rd September.

"Simply mounted on a three-point linkage I was impressed by the set-up speed compared with the Simba Freeflow drill we'd used previously. Being able to lift the drill meant I was also able to deliver the seed accurately into the corners

while working the headland area first, which is my preferred method.

"There's very good clearance between the tines within the staggered four-row configuration so the trash moves effectively through the coulters during min till or direct drilling. The Sola can also operate in all conditions (direct, minimum tillage or plough press) which is exactly what we needed having brought an additional crop into the rotation," he adds.

"The move away from a four-metre working width to the six-metre means fewer passes, but I've found that the drill is still light enough to go behind our 140HP New Holland T7. I haven't looked at the overall fuel savings yet, but leaving the T8 in the shed has got to be a bonus.

"Although we've only had

the SM1909 for eight months I don't foresee too many maintenance problems on the horizon. The drill has a solid enough build and I like the very hard faced construction around the edge of the seed outlet which should stop the fins wearing out over time. When the tips of the tines begin to wear I can simply replace the tip itself (not the whole tine), which wasn't the case on previous drills we'd had," Mr Jolland adds.

"Coming back to the decision to widen the rotation, one of the key benefits I see is the control of our black-grass. The main plan is to create a stale seedbed and get all the black-grass sprayed off before we drill. However, despite our 'best practice' approach we had found previously that some lighter cultivator drills moved the surface soil too much which actually helped the black-grass to reestablish, undoing some of the good work we'd done pre-drilling," he says.

"The change to the Soladrill has definitely helped the black-grass control because it drills the crop with very little disturbance to the surface soil," Mr Jolland concludes.