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The prospect of being able to make some useful fertiliser cost savings through use of the latest application technologies led to the arrival of a new KRM Bogballe spreader at Newhall Farm near Ware in Hertfordshire last year.

Grower Martin Smith is confident that the machine with its built-in weighing system, variable-rate application and auto working width adjustment will improve accuracy and reduce fertiliser consumption overall.

“We’ve used liquid nitrogen fertiliser for all our arable crops over the past 30 years or so, largely because of the accuracy and high output you get from putting on N with a sprayer,” he says.

“Now we want to do the same with solid fertiliser applications and the KRM package supported by Oliver’s looks to be among the best.”

Newhall Farm runs to around 1200 acres of mainly heavy ground, with 150 acres down to grass for the beef enterprise supplying the family’s Foxholes Farm Shop and Butchery near Hertford.

The rest produces feed wheat – mostly Costello plus some Santiago; spring barley also for feed; and winter barley and winter beans when they suit the rotation.

“I had the good sense to drop oilseed rape six or seven years ago and haven’t used slug pellets since,” says Martin.

He describes the farm’s approach to crop establishment as “simple and straight-forward”, relying on a tine drill much of time because of its ability to go in any conditions, usually after an initial pass or two with a tine and disc combination.

Rotational ploughing and drilling direct into stubbles when conditions are ideal, mainly after beans, are also part of the autumn routine.

Yet that simplicity contrasts with the sophistication of the farm’s new KRM Bogballe twin disc fertiliser spinner with its digital control features.

“We just want to do the best job possible with the fertilisers,” says Martin. “So we’re now signed up with SOYL to get GPS-located soil sampling and together with our agronomist Chris Bumford at Procam we can decide on variable rate applications where it’s appropriate.”

Having had little opportunity to use the new tech so far, operator Mark Birtwistle is looking forward to getting to grips with the spreader, which is set up and monitored through the S10 ISOBUS display on his Claas Axion 830.

“With the built-in weighing system, calibrating the spreader couldn’t be simpler,” he says, “and it was very impressive to have just a few kilos left in the hopper at the end of the first job, it’s obviously very accurate.”

A trip around the boundary of each field sets up the automatic system for accurate on/off control when leaving and approaching headlands, as well as the section control feature that narrows

the working width from either or both sides where tramlines converge or when approaching an angled headland.

Agronomist Chris Bumford says that with a lot of small fields across the farm – the average is just 8ha – section control will make things a lot more precise.

“Together with moving from blanket applications to variable rate spreading across the farm’s different soil types, mostly for compounds at first, the new KRM spreader and its control technology has potential to make a lot of input savings.”

Mark Birtwistle adds that the boundary spreading set-up on the machine looks effective.

“It doesn’t use a deflection device; you simply select boundary spreading on the control display and the discs spin in reverse at a slower speed,” he explains.

“You can see the spread pattern cuts off very sharply, so you don’t get fertiliser thrown into the bottom of the hedge.”

The new technology will take some getting used to, Mark agrees, but it will add interest to the job.

“It’s good to use the brain more; it makes the days go quicker,” he says.

#### About the spreader

The M35W plus with capacities of 1,800 to 3,000 litres is one of three models with integral weighing in the KRM Bogballe M Line; the biggest is the unique M60W plus, with up to 5,550-litre capacity.

Each of the two discs, which spin inwards towards each other, applies half the total quantity across a 180deg spread pattern for even coverage over working widths up to 36m.

The weighing system comprises a 6 tonne cell linked to a parallel double frame that ensures only the weight of the hopper contents is measured.

Dynamic repeat calibration checks that the hopper outlets are set correctly for the flow characteristics of the fertiliser, which can change subtly due to differing ambient conditions through the day and with different batches of bulk fertiliser.

Readings are moderated by data from an accelerometer (bumps and shocks) and an inclinometer (to account for slopes) to achieve the highest accuracy.

For border spreading, reversing the disc rotation causes fertiliser to pass through a slot in the vanes, which halves the working width and creates a sharp cut-off pattern to the border side, with subsequent passes completing the full dressing.

With key components manufactured from stainless steel and built-in ports enabling inaccessible areas to be flushed clean, the Bogballe spreader can give years of accurate, reliable service.