



“Seed is the building block for everything else in the season.”

To treat, or not to treat?

Technical Seed treatments

As growers explore the potential of not treating farm-saved seed, *CPM* weighs up the pros and cons for those sat on the fence over whether to treat, or not to treat.

By Charlotte Cunningham and Lucy De La Pasture

Getting the best from farm-saved seed is as much about cleaning and preparing it effectively, as it is about growing the right stuff in the first place.

But with more growers testing the water when it comes to not treating their seed, it poses the question — do we really need to?

According to Tim Eaton, seed treatment account manager at Certis, treating seed can help to give growers an advantage in terms of performance, before it's even in the ground. “Seed is the building block for everything else in the season. Cleaning and treating it effectively and thoroughly

can make all the difference in growing a successful crop — or not.”

While cost-saving measures could be a reason that some growers choose to skip the treatment stage, Tim says that single purpose seed dressings are actually a very cost-effective option. “Single purpose dressings have been standard practice for a while now and they're very good at what they do. Diseases like bunt are very rarely seen as this type of treatment is used 99% of the time.

“On top of this, they're very cheap as well, compared with a lot of other seed costs — with a spend of roughly £40-£50 per tonne of seed.

Small investment

“In the grand scheme of things, this is a small investment to make on such a critical part of the crop production process.”

Despite their proven success, seed treatments aren't for everyone, but there are some pitfalls to be aware of if growers do choose to go down the untreated route, adds Tim. “Obviously, the biggest issue when growers don't treat is seed and soil-borne disease burdens. My advice for best practice is to accurately sample the seed and send it off for analysis to find out exactly what is or isn't present.”

Independent mobile seed cleaner Jenny Eaves, of Premier Seed Services, says she's seen a small increase in reclean only, but believes the decision should come down to grower preference and each individual situation. “As a business we've always been about giving farmers control and choice, enabling them to produce high quality farm-saved seed.”

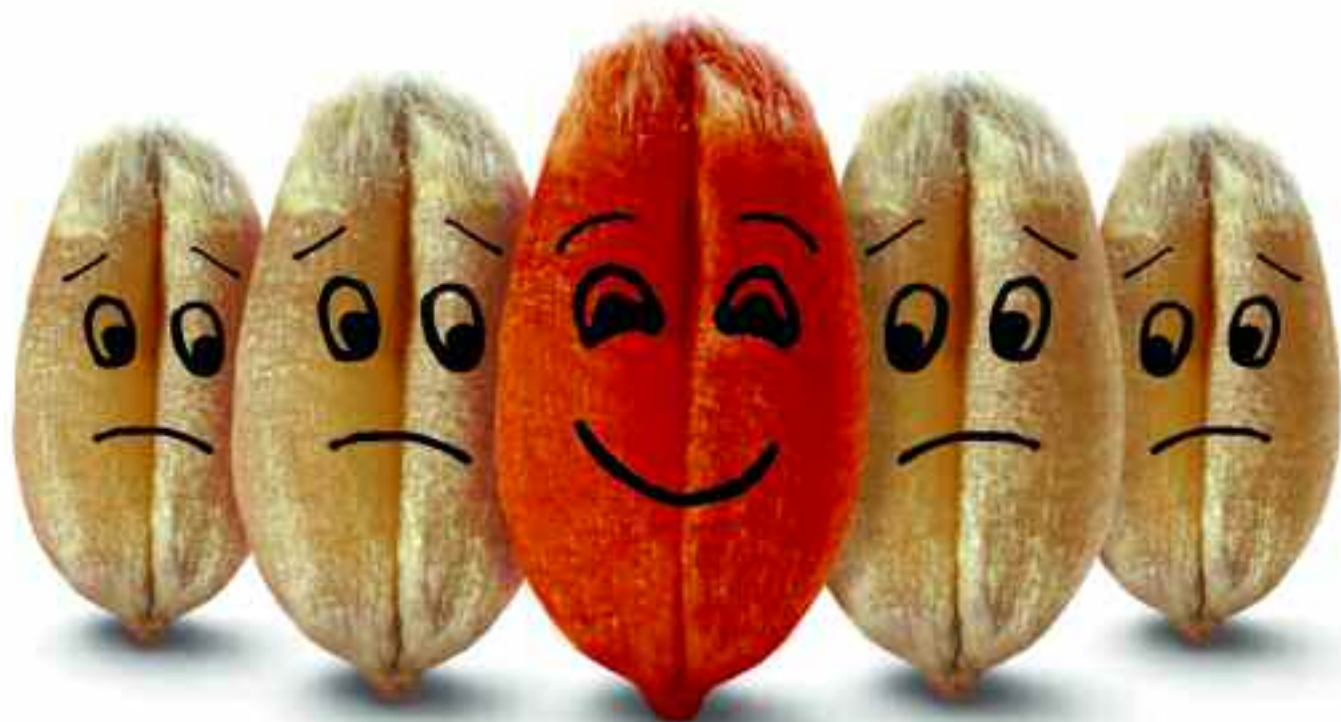
“On the one hand, if the application of a seed treatment doesn't also save a spray the way Redigo Deter (prothioconazole+ clothianidin) did, you can't always ▶



Cleaning and treating seed effectively and thoroughly can make all the difference in growing a successful crop — or not, says Tim Eaton.



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Seed treatments



Jenny Eaves says she's seen a small increase in re-clean only, but believes the decision should come down to grower preference and each individual situation.

► immediately see the direct cost benefit. But in the same breath, the comparatively low-cost investment in a seed treatment is

Advice on dealing with left over treated seed

Though the thought of having left over dressed seed is a reason some growers choose not to treat, storing it safely and efficiently is quite straight forward, according to Tim. "Hopefully, any growers with autumn 2019 seed will have already stored it carefully, but the main things to ensure is that any remaining seed is dry, out of direct sunlight and free from vermin.

"I would also say it's important to get a germination test on the seed before it's drilled. It may or may not have dropped, but either way, it's important to know so seed rate can be adapted accordingly.

"If everything is done correctly, there's no reason treated seed won't last all year."

like getting a vaccine — they protect the quality of your seed and reduce the risk of the return of forgotten seed diseases, such as bunt, in future harvests."

Though the level of control offered by single purpose seed treatments is satisfactory, Jenny believes there has been a lack of manufacturing investment in

new seed treatment development resulting in missed opportunities for UK growers.

"It's a shame there's not the wider choice of new conventional seed treatments available for growers in the UK, as there are for growers in other countries across the world.

"The possibilities for the future use of seed treatment as a delivery method for innovative plant protection products — including nutrition at the point of drilling or bio-pesticides — could be really exciting."

While it's important that growers consider carefully whether or not they treat their farm-saved seed, one area Jenny strongly advises not scrimping on is proper cleaning. "Growers get good value for money using farm-saved seed. Proper cleaning, including gravity separation, is an investment into the quality of your next harvest.

Last resort

"Taking seed 'off the heap' should be a last resort, it risks drilling a multitude of problems which will cost more to address further down the line. It also does nothing to protect the quality reputation and right to farm save in the UK which provides growers an equally high quality, ►

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Following the loss of Deter, Jamie Melrose says he could see a bigger shift towards using untreated seed going forward.

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Vibrance Duo approved for barley

SDHI seed treatment, Vibrance Duo (sedaxane+ fludioxonil) is approved for use on barley seed for this autumn, says Syngenta seedcare marketing manager, Gillian Colman. It will provide control of seed-borne diseases and a boost to establishment, root growth and yield in barley crops.

“Better root structures provide a key foundation for yield and are associated with improved access to water and nutrients and improved crop resilience. As well as seeing benefits in trials from Vibrance Duo in conventional barley, we’ve also seen benefits in hybrid barley, which is already known to be a vigorous crop.”

Syngenta field technical manager Dr Jonathan Ronskley, has been evaluating Vibrance Duo in barley. He says independent results have shown a 32% improvement in the growth of primary roots in treated winter barley seed compared with untreated seed, as well as clear improvements in the number and length of lateral roots.

“Improved rooting becomes all the more important in difficult growing conditions, including wet soils because roots become lazy as they don’t have to grow far to reach moisture. In plot trials looking at establishment of hybrid barley in last year’s wet autumn, Vibrance Duo boosted plant stand to 246 plants/m² compared with 216 plants/m² from a standard seed treatment.

It also boosted early ground cover from 8.5% to 11%.”

Glasshouse tests have shown better barley establishment with Vibrance Duo in normal and drought conditions, says Jonathan.

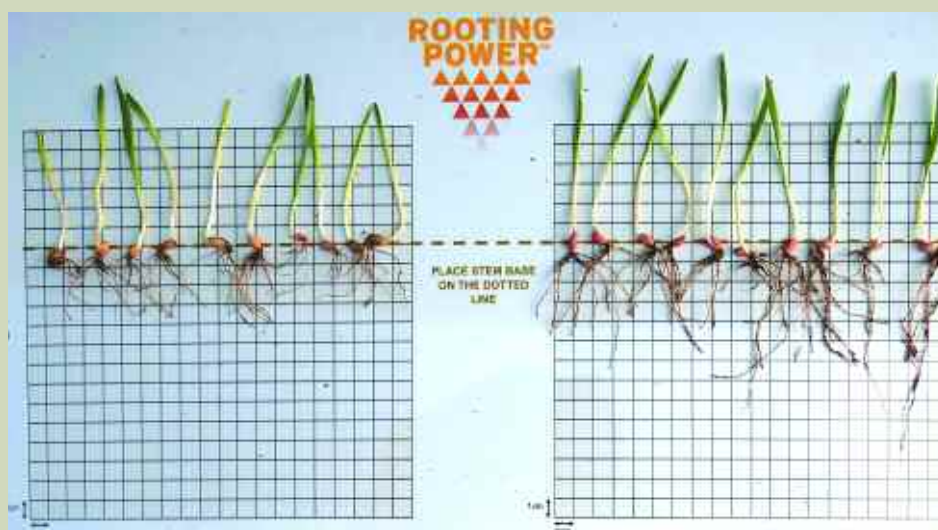
“We’ve also seen clear improvements in spring barley establishment and yield across 24 sites, over three seasons. Yield was boosted by an average of 0.11t/ha compared with a standard seed treatment.”

Vibrance Duo has label approval against leaf

stripe (moderate control), seedling blights (such as *Microdochium nivale*) and covered smut. To improve loose smut control, Syngenta recommend co-application with Rancona 15ME (ipconazole).

“Many of our trials have focused on this Vibrance Duo plus ipconazole combination. It’s highly cost-effective and has given close to 100% control of loose smut and still maintains the other benefits of Vibrance Duo, including rooting and yield,” he explains.

Improved root growth from Vibrance Duo plus ipconazole (right) versus standard seed treatment (left) in spring barley.



▶ but lower cost alternative to bought-in seed.”

So the theory is there, but how does the debate stack up in the field?

Herts farmer, Jamie Melrose, takes a mixed approach when it comes to dressing his farm-saved seed. “As a rule, I’ve traditionally treated the

autumn crop seed but not the spring crops. We grow a lot of spring oats and it’s a fairly low-risk crop so I don’t see any obvious necessity to apply it.

“As well as this, the person we sell the oats to prefers less chemical to be used as it’s better for traceability reasons, so that’s something we keep

in mind too.”

When it comes to autumn seed, like many growers, Jamie had historically used Deter (clothianidin). But with this now no longer an option, he’s considering whether or not treatment will be part of the strategy going forward. “About 80% of what we sowed this autumn had a dressing of Beret Gold (fludioxonil), but 20% had no kind of treatment.

“The blocks of crops are side-by-side and in all honesty, there’s no visible difference between the treated and untreated blocks.”

Jamie echoes the views that the options for growers are limited and says that there’s not a solution for some of his biggest concerns on farm. “There’s the option to go down the Beret Gold route as I’ve done this year, but for me, the biggest concern is BYDV and it

doesn’t protect against that.”

Going forward, Jamie says he could see a bigger shift towards using untreated seed. “While there would be some marginal cost-saving benefits, the biggest benefit would be the reduced man-power involved with treating farm-saved seed. At the moment we’re doing about 200-300t a year which requires a lot of effort.

“Skipping treatment also helps from a flexibility perspective. For example, at the moment I’ve got 30t of treated seed sitting in a bag in a shed. Not only is this an issue if it gets contaminated but can also be a problem if you decide you no longer want to grow a certain crop or variety the following year.

“Time will tell, but at the moment, I’m certainly inclined to grow a lot less treated seed going forward.” ■

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WINTER CEREALS – MATCHING CROP AND VARIETY CHOICES TO DRILLING DATE

EARLY DRILLING CARRIES RISKS SUCH AS BYDV AND BLACK-GRASS, SO HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE CROP AND VARIETY DECISIONS FOR DIFFERENT DRILLING SLOTS?



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If you're facing problems such as BYDV and black-grass, there's no doubt that delaying drilling is the better option.

If you have grass weeds and delaying drilling isn't possible, then winter barley (especially hybrid barley) will be a much better option than winter wheat because of its more competitive growth habit.

Alternatively, in a higher BYDV risk situation with no or low grass weed problems, then winter wheat may be a better option if you can't delay

drilling (provided it is the right variety) – because it is less susceptible to BYDV.

WINTER WHEAT

"Where early-drilled winter wheat is appropriate (e.g. low grass weed pressure), ideal variety characteristics include slow over-winter development, stiff straw and

robust disease resistance," explains Tracy Creasy of Syngenta. *"This is why GLEAM and GRAHAM fit well in this slot. They have performed strongly even when drilled in early September,"* she adds.

"Where delayed drilling is more appropriate, then faster development, good spring vigour and high tillering capacity are valuable variety characteristics – especially in grass weed scenarios where improved crop competition is useful. Vigour is also useful for crop resilience over winter. SY INSITOR and SHABRAS excel in later drilled scenarios, retaining excellent yield potential.

"Meanwhile, GLEAM has high tillering capacity and retention, allowing it to have a wide drilling window," she adds.

For more information on choosing the right winter wheat for your drilling date, rotational position and location, visit www.syngenta.co.uk/varieties.



MARK
BULLEN

SYNGENTA
MARKETING MANAGER
FOR HYBRID BARLEY

HYBRID BARLEY

Winter feed barley growers looking for varieties with drilling date flexibility should consider a hybrid, says Mark Bullen of Syngenta.

Although hybrid barley can be drilled just as early as conventional winter barley, it can also be drilled 2-3 weeks later if needed, provided conditions are suitable, he points out.

"If you're using carryover seed from last autumn, it will be crucial to have it germination tested so seed rates can be increased if needed," Mark explains. *"Carryover seed also needs to be planted first so that it gets the best possible start."*

"Alternatively, with seed bought this autumn, while the latest that growers may want to plant conventional winter barley might be mid-October, depending on location, a hybrid could be drilled up to the end of October in suitable seedbed and weather situations. This is possible due to hybrid vigour – the strong growth and root development of hybrids. Useful spin-off benefits of later drilling include reduced pressure from BYDV and black-grass," he adds.

Key factors to get right if drilling hybrid barley later are to ensure crops go into high quality seedbeds and to use the correct seed rate and nitrogen programme. *"Hybrid barley seed rates may need increasing from their normal low level of 200 seeds per metre squared to 225-250 seeds per metre squared. These higher seed rates should also be used in grass weed situations. Correct nitrogen application timings and dose rates in spring are also important to maximise yield potential and for grass weed suppression,"* says Mark.