

A new vibe



"Group 1 wheats are the backbone of UK bread making flour."

JOE BRENNAN

A new milling wheat variety has entered the Recommended List, offering high treated and untreated yields alongside all-round high quality attributes and agronomics. *CPM* investigates if this new vibe could reinvigorate Group 1.

By Melanie Jenkins

Those keeping an eye on the milling wheat sector may have noticed a new player on the team which could provide UK growers with renewed vigour, but what sort of vibe will the variety bring to the field?

New Group 1 KWS Vibe brings genuinely improved performance to a sector which has seen few new additions in recent years and is the new 'protein' banker for the UK, believes KWS' Olivia Bacon.

Vibe has the highest overall protein production potential on the latest AHDB Recommended List, slotting in just behind KWS Zyatt for yield, she says. "The variety has the best combination of

protein and yield of all Group 1 varieties, but with a much better plant package for growers than previous varieties.

"Its yield of 98% of controls combined with a milling specification protein content of 13.2% sets it apart from its competitors, as does the most comprehensive agronomic package of all the key Group 1 players."

Cefetra's Mary-Jane Bridgford agrees, noting that Vibe's combination of yield, grain quality and disease resistance along with its suitability across all regions, is providing growers with a new and appealing option. "It's been a long time coming but the variety is certainly living up to its

name so we're really excited about it.

"In recent years we've seen some strong additions to the other groups on the RL which has widened the gap between the Group 1 varieties for both yield and disease resistance. So as an

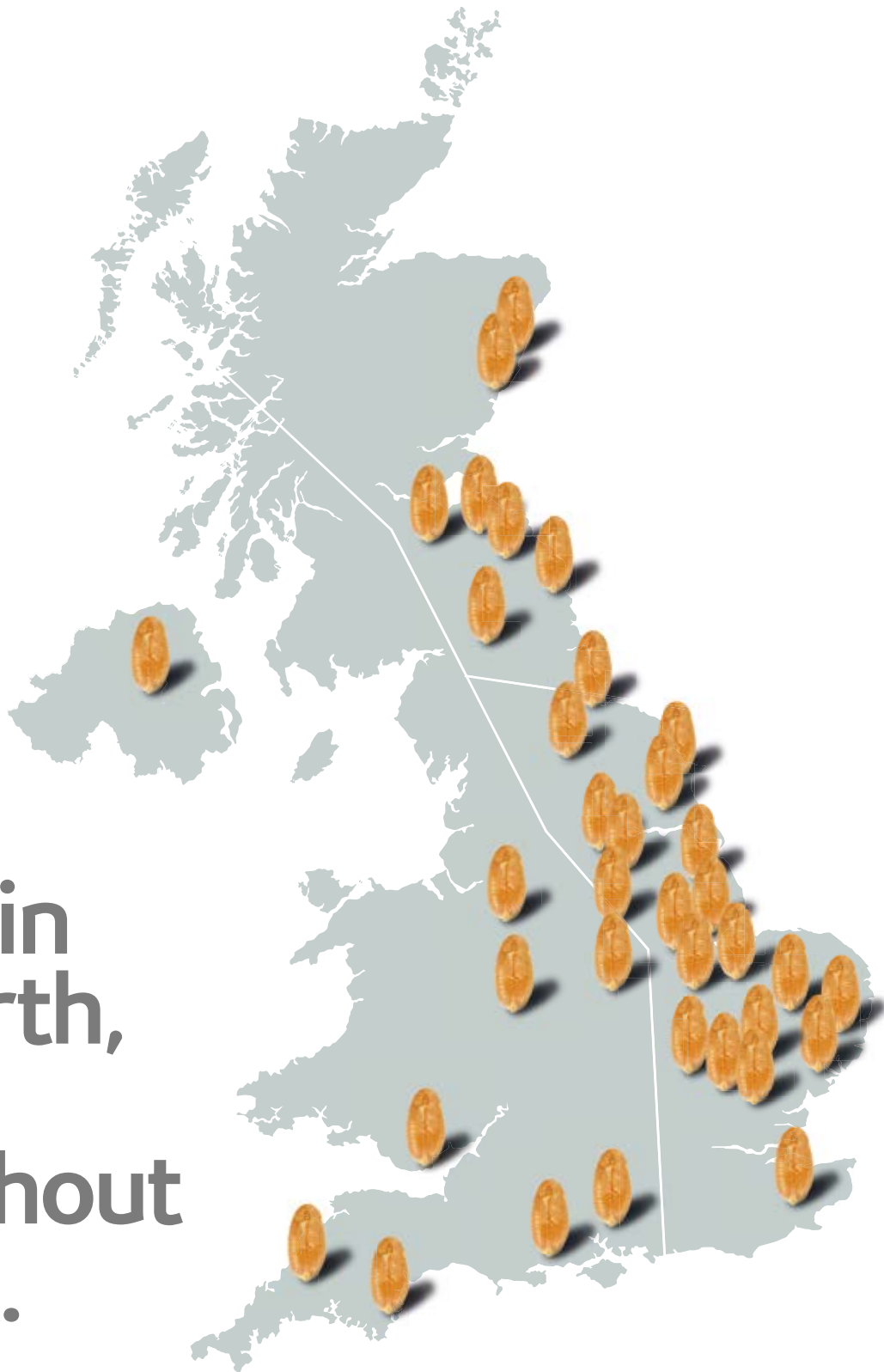


High untreated yield

In RL trials KWS Vibe achieved 98% of control across the UK, recorded its highest yield in the West at 100%, 99% in the North and 97% in the East, with an untreated yield of 89%.

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► industry, we were keen to see a new Group 1 variety like Vibe that gives both excellent milling quality and disease resistance, to ensure we continue to see UK-grown milling wheat.”

Homegrown milling quality wheat is a significant part of UK food security, so the UK flour milling industry requires a productive, profitable domestic farming sector which can meet quality requirements year after year, emphasises Joe Brennan of UK Flour Millers.

CONSISTENT PERFORMERS

“Group 1 wheats are the backbone of UK bread making flour. These are the varieties that we can rely on season after season to produce sustained, high levels of consistent milling and baking performance. They tend to be higher protein wheats, which we term as hard milling. These wheats also have the strong gluten which is crucial to produce the large, relatively tall loaves of bread which UK customers prefer.”

Joe adds that last season was extremely challenging for farmers and followed several difficult years. “We’re seeing this feed into the UK milling industry with our projected use of homegrown wheat for 2024/25 under 70%. This is the lowest proportion in more than 20 years and quite different to a typical year when we use at least 80% homegrown wheat.

“A significant part of the reason for that is the decline in Group 1 wheat production in the UK, from more than 4.5M tonnes in 2019 when it accounted



Food security

Homegrown milling quality wheat is a significant part of UK food security, emphasises Joe Brennan of UK Flour Millers.



Performing well in trials

Vibe has been grown in both large-scale plot trials and in split-field commercial trials for Harvest 2024 on Heathcote Farms and in both cases, the variety performed well.

Passing the test

KWS Vibe holds its own on farm during challenging season

Farms director at Heathcote Farms in Bedfordshire, Andrew Robinson, has a close relationship with KWS, overseeing trials at the enterprise’s main site at Toddington for some time. Operating across three main units, there’s a mix of medium, greensand and chalk soils.

The rotation has adapted to become more flexible, usually consisting of a first and second wheat or barley, followed by a break crop, which will either be oilseed rape, peas, beans or oats, says Andrew.

“We run a lot of trials at Toddington and have done so for many years but have ramped up the amount of trial work since 2014. We’re fortunate to have worked very closely with KWS for many years and this two-way relationship has seen us benefit from seeing some of the firm’s new varieties before commercial release, with Vibe being no different.

Andrew grew Vibe in both large-scale plot trials and in split-field commercial trials for Harvest 2024 and in both cases, the variety performed well. “It had good treated and very good untreated yield, was stiff and its disease scores followed through, with the variety remaining clean during

an extremely testing season.

“During which we saw our wheat yields down from our 10-year average of 11.46t/ha to 10.18t/ha, but in the commercial split-field trial, Vibe yielded above the year’s average at 10.53t/ha.

“We’ve planted 55ha for Harvest 2025, some of which was planted just before the biblical rain we had on 22 September 2024, while a further two fields were sown in early November,” he explains. “Incredibly, more than 90% of the September-drilled crop has survived, which we believe is partly down to the variety’s strong vigour.”

The crop has had a pre-emergence based around aclonifen but no post-em due to the ground being saturated, adds Andrew. “As of mid-April it’s received 51kg/ha SO3 plus 185kgN/ha and it’s due another 55kgN/ha; the September-drilled area has had a T0 based around a PGR, nutrition and the biostimulant Scyon.

“Vibe has come through the winter extremely well considering the start it had, plus I’ve seen good vigour in the spring as well. So far it looks clean but I want it to yield 3-4% above Crusoe and RGT Illustrious while achieving 13% protein to maintain its position on farm,” he concludes.

for approximately 28% of the UK wheat area, to just above 2.5M tonnes, 25% of the UK wheat area, in 2024.”

Another issue with Group 1s is a decline in the ability of farmers to achieve the required specifications, often linked in recent seasons to unfavourable weather conditions and exceptionally high costs for inputs such as nitrogen fertiliser, he points out.

“Data from AHDB’s Cereal Quality Survey indicates that the percentage of Group 1 wheat meeting specification (13% protein, 250 Hagberg, 76kg/hl) declined from 48% in 2018 to just 13% in 2023, with a slight bounce back to 20% in 2024,” he says.

Vibe is unusual in that it achieved Group 1 performance at NL1 and NL2 in 2022 and 2023, as well as the RL stage in 2024 – three contrasting seasons, highlights Olivia.

BAKING QUALITY

“Characterised by good grain quality, including a Hagberg of 283 and a specific weight of 79.1kg/hl, it consistently delivered higher protein at 13.2% than the control in each of the three years, exhibiting good gluten quality, loaf volumes and overall baking performance.”

Looking closer at its bread-making characteristics, Olivia notes that in baking tests at the Allied Technical Centre, Vibe has outperformed KWS Zyatt in every situation. “It has a softer, white crumb, larger loaf volume and good loaf height, as well as improved layering performance in pastries and better crumb in rolls. Vibe will appeal to milling wheat growers who want a variety which combines high yield with high protein.”

In trials by millers, Vibe demonstrated high quality, protein and specific weight as well as consistent breadmaking performance season after season, says Joe. “This is what defines a Group 1, as opposed to a Group 2 variety.

“As an industry we assess varieties at NL1, NL2 and RL stage, so three years of testing. And for Group 1 wheats we also carry out a commercial assessment where we have 60t of each new variety grown to standard milling specification and send it to flour millers to be milled on a commercial scale.

“Batches of 1t of that flour go to mills across the country, even those not involved in the earlier three years of testing, allowing us to confirm what we’ve seen during the previous

three years – that the variety is of the consistent quality that we’d expect from a Group 1 and that it should command a corresponding premium.”

Based on this, Vibe has been fully approved by the flour milling industry as a Group 1 following commercial scale quality assessments, he points out.

In RL trials it achieved 98% of control across the UK, recorded its highest yield in the West at 100%, 99% in the North and 97% in the East, with an untreated yield 89% of control, says Olivia.

“Across the rotation, KWS Vibe delivers excellent performance, both as a first wheat at 98% of control and as a second cereal at 97%, which is important because 60% of milling wheats are sown in the second cereal position. In the early



Northern suitability

KWS Vibe’s slow development, its ability to tiller, and a score of 7 for eyespot resistance makes it an ideal variety to start drilling early, a key requirement for growers further north, says KWS’ Olivia Bacon.

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► and late sown slots the variety achieved 98% and 99% of control respectively, 98% on both light and heavy soils.”

Offering a strong agronomic package with no weaknesses, Vibe provides improved disease ratings and untreated yield than comparators, she highlights. “Vibe has a 7 for eyespot and mildew, it scores 8 for yellow rust which will really help Group 1 milling wheat growers, together with a 6 for brown rust, 6.6 for septoria and 6 for fusarium.”

Although it appears there aren’t any major weaknesses to the variety, Cefetra’s Kate Armstrong points out that it doesn’t have orange wheat blossom midge resistance. “This is something to be aware of, but this is the case for most Group 1 varieties.

“It also has a reasonably slow growth habit up until GS32 which should be considered in regard to its competitiveness against weeds,” she adds.



Winning combination
Cefetra’s Mary-Jane Bridgford notes that Vibe’s combination of yield, grain quality and disease resistance means it’s providing growers with a new and appealing option.

KWS Vibe at a glance

Yield (% treated controls)	
UK treated	98
UK untreated	88.8
East region treated	97
West region treated	99.6
North region treated	[99]
Grain quality	
Specific weight (kg/hl)	79.1
Protein content (%) – milling spec	[13.2]
Hagberg Falling Number	283
Agronomics	
Resistance to lodging without PGR	7.7
Resistant to lodging with PGR	7.9
Straw length without PGR (cm)	87.8
Ripening (days +/- Skyfall)	+1
Disease resistance	
Mildew	[7]
Yellow rust	8
Yellow rust (young plant)	S
Brown rust	6.4
Septoria	6.6
Eyespot	7@
Fusarium ear blight	6.4
Orange wheat blossom midge	-

Source: AHDB Recommended List, winter wheat 2025/26. [] = limited data.
@ = Believed to carry the Pch1 Rendezvous resistance gene to eyespot; as this is a breeders’ claim, it has not been verified in RL tests.

Vibe is stiff strawed and 87cm high without a PGR, has an 8 for resistance to lodging with or without a PGR, and is rated +1 days for ripening compared with the control, comments Olivia.

“Regional dates for sowing are from 1 September in Scotland and North Lincolnshire/Yorkshire, 15 September for the West and Midlands, and 20 September for East Anglia, the Midlands and South, with the latest safe sowing date at the end of January,” she says.

Whereas Vibe’s slow development, its ability to tiller, and a score of 7 for eyespot resistance makes it an ideal variety to start drilling early, a key requirement for growers further north, adds Olivia. “In addition, it delivers some of the highest yields compared with current Group 1 wheats on the current RL in this region, giving growers access to premium market opportunities where available.

“In the East and West regions Vibe is all about yield, market potential, disease resistance and field performance, making it one of the most profitable wheats a farmer can grow.”

Cefetra’s confidence in the variety is clear from its buyback offering. “We’ve had a buyback for Harvest 2026 in place because we know that Vibe has huge marketability due to its consistently high protein levels, even during the past two seasons when we’ve seen some of the other Group 1 varieties struggle to make full spec milling quality,” concludes Kate. ●

Late April-drilled wheat defies odds

Despite being a highly bold and risky move, drilling Blackstone in late April 2024 delivered the goods for Stranraer-based grower, Jamie Kyle

With autumn conditions proving relentless for two years on the bounce, Scottish grower Jamie Kyle had little choice but to find an alternative route forward to enable the farm to continue growing winter wheat.

This led Jamie, who runs family business Robstone Farming Company together with his parents and brother Iain, to seek out a winter wheat variety which could be spring-sown. However, what followed may prove astounding, even to the most risk-inclined individuals.

That's because in researching a suitable variety, Jamie was advised by agronomist Cameron Ferguson to consider Group 4 soft wheat Blackstone, based on its vernalisation data indicating its potential when drilled in March. But thanks to continued inclement weather, this was pushed to the absolute limit.

"The original intention was to drill Blackstone in March, however, after ordering the seed we had another weather set back and the ground wasn't suitable for drilling until late April – more than a month later than we'd intended.

"We'd already paid for the order and spring seed wasn't available. So with few other options

and despite both the breeder's and AHDB's official advice, we took a calculated gamble and drilled 10ha of Blackstone at a high seed rate of 400 seeds/m² on April 28 following a late harvested potato crop," explains Jamie.

Although the quality of the seedbed was poor to moderate, plus a pre-em herbicide couldn't be applied, he says the crop showed competitive early vigour and raced through its early growth stages.



Flexible drilling

Blackstone's drilling flexibility means it could be a good option given the ongoing weather challenges in Scotland.

"For nutrition, two main splits of nitrogen were applied totalling 160kgN/ha, and on Cameron's advice, we went with just a two-spray fungicide programme. Spring is a relatively short season in West Scotland, so any septoria present was coming into a growing crop not waiting to explode since the winter, meaning I believe it was the right call."

He says T1 was applied on 17 June comprising 1.0 l/ha of bixafen+prothioconazole+spiroxamine, plus 1.0 l/ha of folpet. It was applied two weeks after Blackstone had received its second split of nitrogen, and having tillered well, was looking exceptionally green and lush by mid-June, adds Jamie.

"For an extra boost we went with 3.0 l/ha of Seamac Gold foliar biostimulant. Then T2 was applied on 18 July using the same chemistry as the T1, but

increasing the rates of bixafen+prothioconazole+spiroxamine to 1.2 l/ha."

Jamie highlights that Blackstone

stood well throughout the summer with no signs of lodging, although it always appeared slightly forward. "And despite some high septoria pressure, it looked almost as clean as our other winter wheat Extase.

"The one slight disappointment was that we didn't get the grain swell in the spring crops due to a lack of sunlight that summer, which probably hurt the final bushel weight."

Harvest took place on 3 October with

Blackstone achieving a final overall yield of 7.4t/ha at 15% moisture.

"The final bushel weight was also better than we'd anticipated at 74.2kg/hl with a very respectable straw yield of 3.7t/ha. Based on these results I've increased my area of Blackstone to 16ha for Harvest 2025 with a firm eye on the distilling market, due to having William Grant's distillery on our doorstep.

"In the context of the risk we took I was delighted with the overall performance. Blackstone showed excellent early vigour, stood really well, didn't require a PGR and produced a lot of very stiff straw," comments Jamie.

With the ongoing weather challenges in Scotland he believes there's a place in rotations for varieties with Blackstone's drilling flexibility. "Given its performance last year, I'd definitely put it ahead of a spring wheat despite its winter wheat classification," he says.

After hearing the news of Blackstone's remarkable late-sown performance on Jamie's farm, Elsoms' Toby Reich, adds a word of caution.

"While it's always great to hear about successful outcomes from our varieties, if you're considering drilling any Elsoms variety after its latest safe-sowing date, please check with our team of experts first, as we may have more information about the risks.

"AHDB's official latest safe sowing date for Blackstone is the end of February, however, without speculating on yield-potential impacts, varieties such as Blackstone do show good levels of vernalisation, even in plots sown into late March," concludes Toby.

"In the context of the risk we took I was delighted with the overall results."