

Profiting from Reducing Tillage and Lowering Emissions

Case Study 6

Alistair Hodge—Whitsome Farm



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Alistair Hodge farms at Whitsome, East Newton in the Scottish Borders.

Fully cropped, Alistair combines 650 acres, and the rotation comprises legumes, winter oilseed rape winter wheat and winter barley. He describes the soils as well bodied, of the Whitsome series with parts of the farm running in the Hornbean series and being of a higher clay content. Sheep integrate into the arable rotation. Aside from the harvesting period, Alastair operates the arable enterprise himself and moved to strip tillage in 2018 as his interest in low soil disturbance crop establishment grew. This led to the purchase of a fully mounted 3 metre Sumo DTS, a configuration that makes it easy to move freely around the farm. The sumo has a leading cutting disc with a shoulder for depth control and the seed coulter is preceded by a fixed leg of adjustable depth depending on crop being sown. Oilseed rape and beans are drilled with a 1" coulter moving to a 5" coulter for cereals where the seed is placed in two rows 3" apart and either side of the leading leg. Alistair has modified the drill such that he can apply liquid fertiliser behind the seed and has also mounted a stocks hopper and fan unit giving him the flexibility to sow companion clover, small seeds in cover mixtures and slug pellets if required.

Baling the winter barley straw makes it easier to establish the rape. There is a requirement to bale some wheat straw for the bed and breakfasted cattle enterprise, but any surplus straw leaves the farm in return for muck.

Adjusting to high fertiliser prices Alistair hasn't been afraid to pull back on bagged N particularly for the oilseed rape, last year he applied just 120Kg/haN relying on an understory of clover and applications of fulvic and humic acid as soil enhancers.

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