

AGRONOMY

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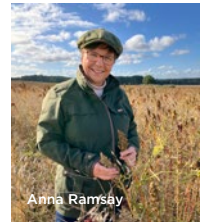
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Don't chase the payment - consider rotational implications of SFI options

There is no doubt that Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) actions can produce benefits such as improved soil structure and biology, increased organic matter and nutrient capture and retention. However, care needs to be taken when introducing new seed and species mixtures into a rotation to ensure they don't pose a risk to cash crops.



Anna Ramsay

"There are many advantages to growing cover crops, but if not thoroughly planned, unfortunately there can be disadvantages too," warns Kings technical advisor, Anna Ramsay. "It is important to use clean seed from a reliable supplier to avoid inadvertently bringing weeds or pests onto the farm."

"We are seeing more SFI actions being used as part of the crop rotation, so we need to be aware of the wider impacts on agronomy," points out SFI delivery lead, Hannah Clarke.

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Hannah Clarke

“That means being aware of the species that may be included in mixtures used as a break or companion crop.”

For instance, legumes like clover and vetch; and brassicas such as radish, mustard and kale, can act as hosts for pests and diseases such as foot rot in

vining peas, or can increase clubroot or nematode risk with other species. As a result, end markets for some crops may impose restrictions on their use elsewhere in the rotation.

“If you are growing beet, potatoes or carrots, then you need to carefully consider the choice of radish, choosing multi-resistant varieties to help reduce beet-cyst nematodes and free-living nematodes,” says Hannah.

“Also, different types of radish flower at different times, and an early flowering species can set seed and become a weed issue, while later flowering types will still be leafy when you want to destroy them.”

“Where you have a lot of biomass to destroy, you are normally looking at higher rates of glyphosate, but you might consider glyphosate + 2,4-D,” continues Anna.

“If using glyphosate with 2,4-D you will need to ensure you adhere to the following crop planting interval required after application.

“However, some actions such as multi-species spring and summer cover crops (SOH2 and SOH3) prevent you destroying them more than two weeks before drilling the following cash crop, so you need to involve your agronomist from the outset.”



Think about management requirements

Timing is a key consideration in choosing the right action for other reasons too. For example, if CAHL2 winter bird food mixes are not established before 30 June, they have to be in place for two winters rather than one.

“We need to be aware of the wider impacts on agronomy.”

She also points out that herbicides used in the previous cash crop could influence establishment of environmental crops.

Other treatments used on preceding crops can also limit your options. Hannah adds that growers using sugar beet seed treated with neonicotinoids cannot legally grow flowering crops for 32 months.

“As a result, we have made a specific mix which contains species that are permitted, but it limits options to mostly cereals and some brassicas.”

Winter cover crops can also act as a green bridge for pests, so thorough destruction five-to-six weeks prior to spring drilling is essential. The species choice will affect which plants are most attractive to pests such as peach-potato aphid or slugs. The ability to control grassweeds may also be a consideration for growers with a high black-grass burden.

“Think about what’s best for your rotation and your farm.”

“There is absolutely room for these SFI actions on farm, but you need to make sure you are not sacrificing yield in your main crops. You need to consider the implications of the actions. Think about what’s best for your rotation and your farm; look beyond the payment. Getting the correct advice is critical.”

