



**A fresh start** Get the best from your spring crops

**Golden hello** Better oilseed rape establishment pays dividends

**In the field** AICC Academy shows way forward for next generation

# the Independent Agronomist

AICC 

ADVICE YOU CAN TRUST FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CROP CONSULTANTS | SUMMER 2017



## Working for you

How commercially impartial advice benefits your farm business



### **HOW IS AICC GOVERNED?**

The Association of Independent Crop Consultants is governed by a Council of Management (Directors of AICC), selected from the Membership and managed by the CEO. There is a separate trials team with representation from each trials region.

### **TRAINING**

Training is staged in seven regions by coordinators who provide Members with important technical product updates and advice on other issues related to the industry. Additional training is also offered on industry issues and specialised crops, including sugar beet, among others. We also collaborate with industry partners to provide bespoke training in addition to the AICC Academy.

### **SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS**

AICC Members gain discounts on various industry schemes and professional indemnity cover. Our Members also receive help and support about business and industry issues.

### **AICC AT CEREALS**

AICC has attended the Cereals event since its inception. The event provides a good opportunity to demonstrate, using the exhibitor plots, how an independent agronomist will approach a strategy to maintain yields while managing inputs at realistic costs. The emphasis is on allowing best practice and good science to be the driver for production.

### **CONFERENCE**

AICC has created a national conference, which the Chief Executive manages. It is now recognised as an important industry event held annually between the Oxford Farming Conference and LAMMA every January. It starts with an Academy Training day on the Monday and then a Member-only day on the Tuesday opening to exhibitors and guests for the Wednesday afternoon, evening dinner and Thursday. Speakers are sought from all over the world and presentations are not edited. They provide highly technical data for Members to interpret and provide a vital forum for stimulating debates and innovative information sharing.

Some 32 companies exhibit on the trade show day, ranging from agrochemical manufacturers, seed breeders and agronomy software companies to technology companies and research institutions. They welcome the opportunity to meet 140 independent agronomists in one place every year.

### **THE FUTURE**

AICC takes the view that it is healthy to have a near 50% share of the advisory market and expects to see the independent share increase. The current climate is enhancing the independent thought process, independent of Europe and independent in thought. Why wouldn't a grower wish to have an independent adviser?





AICC Chief Executive  
**Sarah Cowrick** explains  
how the AICC champions  
causes on behalf of UK  
farmers and its Members

# Supporting farmers and our Members

**W**e believe that employing an AICC Crop Consultant enables farmers to receive the best possible independent agronomic advice with the ability to purchase crop inputs at the most competitive prices.

AICC was established in 1981 with 12 Members and now has 252 with a market share approaching 50% in arable advice in the UK. Although each crop consultant is a Member in their own right, 83% of Members are now affiliated in one form or another to a group giving them the economies of scale to provide in-house expert advice to clients, cover for each other and recruit trainees.

AICC provides a unique forum for the exchange of technical information and reinforces the independence of its Members. AICC Members adhere to a strict Code of Conduct which underpins the whole ethos of independent advice.

Independent Crop Consultants – AICC Members – are employed by their farmer clients to give all-round agronomic and strategic advice, and are paid by a separate consultancy fee (usually on an area basis). Comprehensive agronomic advice includes core crop protection, crop nutrition, environmental issues, cultivations and strategic planning.

AICC agronomists understand it is the grower's choice whether he chooses to buy advice or not. A core of exclusively independent and bespoke technical advice – not linked to sales – backed by independent research, exists and represents not only exceedingly good value but is underpinned by truly up to date agronomic practice.

Clients are then able to purchase products through buying groups, or from wherever they choose, at competitive prices. This is an openly transparent system, enabling clients to differentiate between what they are paying for their advice and what they are paying for their crop inputs.

AICC champions causes on behalf of its Members and is encouraging a more collaborative approach to protect the chemistry we currently have. At the same time, we embrace the cultural and more innovative technologies that are rapidly developing to support agronomists and farmers in the future. As you will read from our Chairman's article overleaf, several industry issues have been championed by AICC.

### ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CROP CONSULTANTS (AICC)

Agriculture Place, Drayton Farm, East Meon, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 1PN

**T:** +44 (0)1730 823881 **E:** [info@aicc.org.uk](mailto:info@aicc.org.uk) **W:** [www.aicc.org.uk](http://www.aicc.org.uk)

*The Independent Agronomist is produced by Ruralcity Media on behalf of the AICC.*

## INSIDE

---



**4**

### EXPERTISE

How impartial advice benefits your farm business



**6**

### AICC TRIALS

Securing a positive future for farmers and agronomists



**8**

### ACADEMY

AICC academy trains next generation of agronomists



**11-14**

### TECHNICAL

How growers can optimise arable crop management



**15**

### BUYING GROUPS

Obtain the best prices by using our buying groups

# Working for you

AICC Chairman **Sean Sparling** ARAgS, explains how impartial advice benefits your farm business



Our Members deliver commercially independent agronomic advice to farms across the UK, providing unbiased opinion on over 1.5 million hectares – almost 50% of UK farms – delivering technical guidance on all aspects of crop production, integrated crop management, (ICM), independent pest management (IPM) and environmental schemes, backed by the results and information generated from a comprehensive nationwide trials programme.

Our Membership is comprised wholly of commercially independent advisers who sell nothing but their unbiased advice.

I feel privileged to have been elected as AICC Chairman in January 2017. In 1993, I moved over to independent agronomy joining a small firm of AICC agronomists based in Lincolnshire. In 2003, I formed Sparling Agronomy Services Ltd, where I now look after 10,000ha of arable and combinable crops providing advice to my growers on all aspects of crop production.

I'm a firm believer that the harder you work the luckier you get. As a result I received the Food & Farming Industry Award of Agronomist of the year 2007 and was honoured by being awarded Associate Fellowship of the Royal Agricultural Society last year for services to agronomy.

I have been the agronomist on an independent farming programme in Lincolnshire every Sunday for

the last 17 years, broadcasting to over 50,000 listeners a week across counties including Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Rutland and Suffolk. The "LincsFM Farming Programme" itself the recipient of a national award for Best Specialist Programme 2016.

I am passionate and outspoken about UK agriculture. I am fiercely independent and regularly after dinner speak about farming at dinners across the country and Europe. It's been a busy first few months in the Chair as AICC continues to be at the forefront of independent advice, where we are constantly in demand for comment on our industry from TV programmes such as *Countryfile* to national newspapers like the *Financial Times*.

## Independent

As an Independent agronomist, I sell nothing but my advice – just like every AICC Member. My job is to recommend the use of agrochemicals in such a way as to reduce any potential risk to statistically insignificant levels for consumers, wildlife and the environment to produce safe sustainable high quality food.

We can see that the potential consequences to UK agriculture resulting from the removal of what is already a sparse portfolio of plant protection products, are likely to be devastating to farm incomes. Crop yields and food quality will be compromised, farm businesses themselves will become unsustainable as the cost of production begins to outstrip margins and there is a very real threat that prime arable land will be taken out of production completely. There is also a real possibility we will lose whole crop groups in some areas of the UK – for example winter cereals and oilseed rape if blackgrass and cabbage stem flea beetle are allowed to thrive in the absence of adequate available control measures.

“ Managing the risks associated with those hazards is what we as the AICC and the wider industry do



All plant protection products are potentially hazardous if used incorrectly – but managing the risks associated with those hazards is what we as the AICC and the wider industry do. The dose is the toxin, therefore the management of the risk is what makes the hazard benign.

The AICC believes that the plant protection products available to farmers, when used in accordance with the labels, are well regulated and as safe as possible for the operator, consumer and environment. We routinely follow ICM and IPM protocols and strictly adhere to guidelines and practises recommended by our industry regulators. This way, we are confident that we as an industry are producing wholesome, sustainable and nutritious food in a system designed to ensure that every stage from application to consumption and in between is safe. We need to have the tools available to enable us to continue to do so.

## Glyphosate

Newer more refined actives, formulated to be more efficient, stable and ultimately safer have constantly superseded older outdated chemistry. The chemistry we have available to us today is a shrinking portfolio, but is as safe as possible due to scientific progress and the evolution of targeted agronomic practices. Therefore, the prospect of losing inherently safe actives such as glyphosate is of huge concern to the industry. Hazard and risk are being confused and molecules scientifically proven to pose no discernible risk over a lifetime to consumers, non-target species or to the wider environment when used correctly are under threat of withdrawal. Glyphosate is an example of the consequence of confusing hazard and risk. In terms of its risk to consumers and wildlife, it is one of the safest products in agriculture – without it, hundreds of thousands of hectares are at risk of

being abandoned to blackgrass in the UK. The most dangerous thing about glyphosate is the van that delivers it. The cost to the industry and the consumer of that hazard/risk confusion and of these revocations, the implications to farm businesses, food availability, quality and lower yields, falling farm incomes, increased production costs and prime land going out of production is potentially catastrophic.

Without tools like glyphosate to manage pernicious weeds like resistant blackgrass, land will quickly become un-farmable. Food production is vital, and seeing technically safe chemistry revoked with no alternative in place is likely to devastate our industry.

Risk and hazard are very different. A hazard is only an issue when the risk of exposure to it increases. Risk is the likelihood of exposure to the hazard. A roller skate on the stairs is a hazard, the chances of stepping on it is the risk, but we wouldn't revoke roller-skates because someone might tread on one on a staircase.

## Neonicotinoids

There is growing concern regarding the devastating consequences of a blanket ban on all outdoor uses of neonicotinoid seed treatments in non-bee attractive crops such as wheat, barley and sugar beet. The call comes in response to European Commission proposals to widen current neonicotinoid restrictions to ban all uses on field-grown crops, extending its current restrictions to include non-flowering crops. This is being instigated by anti-pesticide lobbying groups and in our opinion, the industry must come together to oppose such an unnecessary and cynical ban.

Virus yellows in beet would be uncontrollable without Thiamethoxam seed dressings due to *Myzus Persicae* pyrethroid resistance issues. The impact of BYDV in cereals and lack of reliable foliar insecticides on the main vectors would have a big effect on crop production quality and yields as well as a knock on effect on farm and agronomy businesses.





# Trials and technology underpin a positive future for independent agronomy

**A**ICC has had a long history of running in house trials for the benefit of its Members. The portfolio of trials projects undertaken and regional extent of these Member trials has been significantly increased in the last eight years. The AICC Trials team comprises a committee of highly proficient and technically driven established agronomists from the South, West, East, Central and Northern regions of England along with Scotland.

AICC Trials run a national series of independent field trials that are principally involved in testing and comparing the performance of current and near market agrochemicals. Our trials also focus on specific agronomic issues such as nitrogen response, the role of micronutrients and the use of adjuvants.

In addition, we also run a number of regional variety trials to compare the performance of new and established varieties. Currently, the main focus of these trials is early drilled winter wheat varieties, along with trialling the tolerance of winter oilseed rape varieties to Verticillium wilt.

AICC Trials data is turned around quickly to maximize the benefit to Members. Externally, manufacturers have commented on how efficient and professionally handled the trials are. AICC Members are able to attend a detailed results session at our Annual Conference each year as well as inspecting trials sites during the season.

This resource is, of course, only one of the many pools of information that AICC Members use (see infographic on opposite page). But there is no doubt that access to these extensive independent trials results and innovative technology is key to being at

the forefront of delivering technical excellence – and providing AICC Members with the tools to deliver the most cost effective advice to growers.

## AICC CROP DATA APP

In addition to the AICC Trials – and in conjunction with Farming Online – we have recently launched an innovative field monitoring satellite image tool. This tool allows growers and agronomists to see real-time data on crop development and bench mark their crops against the same crops within their region. It is designed to identify potential problem areas within crops during the growing season to support management decisions and will be available to use via mobile phone, tablet or PC.

The app uses Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) output from satellites. Areas of crop growth are shown in green – the darker the green, the better the growth. Problem areas, such as weed patches, are shown in yellow or blue, with very poor areas shown in red.

Growers and agronomists can use screen shots of satellite images showing the field to identify areas of poor growth. They can see easily where dense patches of weeds have competed with the crop and reduced growth substantially. This demonstrates clearly the potential value of the project to our Members.

We are now able to manipulate the data to see satellite images for all the fields entered into the app.

New features include the ability to roll back the images to view crop growth over time using a slide bar along the bottom of the screen, the date of the data changes as the slide bar is moved. Two different growth characteristics – Growth Rate and Leaf Wetness (moisture content of the crop) – can also be displayed.

A model is being built to determine crops by their spectral signature and we are now able to predict some crops with a high degree of accuracy.

## WHERE DO AICC MEMBERS GET THEIR TECHNICAL INFORMATION?

### AICC MEMBERS

- INTERPRET THEIR OWN DATA
- MAKE OWN CONCLUSIONS BASED ON TECHNICAL MERIT
- ARE NOT INFLUENCED BY PRODUCT SALES

### Valuable information

AICC consultants have a wealth of experience and cover all parts of the country. Agronomists are on hand to discuss issues such as the impact of rotation and variety choice on weed and disease management – and ways of controlling costs this year and going into 2018.

The AICC champions causes on behalf of its Members and is encouraging a more collaborative approach to protect the chemistry we currently have. At the same time, we embrace the cultural and more innovative technologies that are rapidly developing to support our farmers.





# AICC Academy trains next generation of agronomists

We are working hard to ensure independent agronomy has a strong future – and offers a rewarding career

**A**ICC launched its own in-house Academy scheme in 2015 to assist Members in growing their business and to future proof the continued growth of independent agronomy.

The aim of the Academy is to enhance the level of expertise of these new entrants who may have just completed or are in the process of gaining their

BASIS and FACTS qualifications. It provides them with a sound technical platform in preparation for a career in independent agronomy.

AICC has looked at various ways to address the issue of succession based schemes available to trainees run by other groups. But it decided to run its own bespoke academy to support AICC Members with their chosen trainees.

There is clearly a demand for young entrants who have already started working within AICC Member groups. Some 26 trainees are currently on the scheme. Trainees will have a BASIS qualification or will be working towards it and are already working with an established AICC Member or Member group.

AICC Members will be able to enrol their trainees, or those who have newly qualified, onto the scheme and each group will go through the academy together therefore providing another network of support for their future career.

The academy operates in modular form, covering all aspects of agronomy including crops, nutrition, harvesting and storage, rotations and cropping systems, management of resistance, soil management, precision farming, sprayer technology, business management, agricultural policy, farm finances and AICC business support.

Specialised courses cover topics on bringing products to market and blackgrass management. Trainees are exposed to industry partner training and networks. They are assisted with accessing and interpreting independent R&D data.

The AICC Academy is funded by AICC and supported by industry partners.







## CASE STUDY

## BRETT POINTING, CCC AGRONOMY

In his last year at Reading University, Brett Pointing did not think it was possible to land his dream role as an independent agronomist as he searched for a graduate role.

But after a successful interview with CCC Agronomy and entry into the AICC academy, Mr Pointing is now well on the way to fulfilling his ambition of offering impartial advice to farmers and helping to improve their businesses.

"I assumed I'd have to go into the service industry as a stepping stone to the independent sector, so when the opportunity with CCC came along, I jumped at the chance.

"The Academy is a fantastic way of enabling smaller businesses take on young trainees for succession

and I would thoroughly recommend anyone interested in independent agronomy go down this route," he says.

Mr Pointing has completed modules on crop nutrition and soil fertility and rotation, and says the teaching has been a combination of engaging class- and field-based sessions.

"The technical side is excellent, as you have the top guys at organisations like NIAB showing you the latest and most up to date research. It provides a good reference point for the work we are doing out in the field.

"The networking is also very important and there are about 26 of us on the Academy now. It's really good to see so many other young independent agronomists coming through," he adds.

“ The Academy is a fantastic way of enabling smaller businesses take on young trainees



## CASE STUDY

## OSCAR THACKER, NIAB TAG

Oscar Thacker says the AICC Academy provided him with the rounded technical knowledge required to meet future challenges in his role as trainee regional agronomist for NIAB TAG.

Succession planning is a top priority within the advisory group and Mr Thacker is now under the mentorship of current northern regional agronomist and AICC Member Patrick Stephenson, with a view to taking over the role in the years ahead.

To help in his development, Mr Thacker was entered into the AICCA last year and has so far completed two modules, the first on blackgrass management at ADAS and the other on soil fertility and crop rotation, taught by experts at NIAB.

He says a positive aspect has been the small class size, allowing plenty of

open discussion on the subject at hand and minimal data fuelled PowerPoint presentations in the classroom.

"Each expert explained what they are doing in their research field and why, and gave some practical take home messages, which I've been able to discuss with Patrick in the field and see how they can be applied across different farm situations," he explains.

Mr Thacker says the course has been entirely funded by AICC and the social opportunity to meet likeminded trainees is helping to build a network of colleagues for the future.

"I would definitely recommend the Academy to anyone that wants to get into independent agronomy, as it will give you a strong background for the future ahead."

“ I would definitely recommend the Academy to anyone that wants to get into independent agronomy

A close-up photograph of several bright yellow flowers, likely from a mustard or rapeseed plant. The flowers have four large, rounded petals and prominent stamens. In the background, there are green buds and leaves, slightly out of focus. The overall lighting is warm and natural.

“GOOD SOIL  
STRUCTURE AND  
NUTRIENT STATUS  
ARE FUNDAMENTAL  
INGREDIENTS  
FOR RAPID  
ESTABLISHMENT.”



# How to optimise oilseed rape establishment

In some parts of the UK, oilseed rape is now the riskiest crop in the rotation as pest pressure increases and weather patterns become more extreme. AICC asked two Members for some advice on negotiating the critical establishment period.



**ANDREW BLAZEY**  
PRIME  
AGRICULTURE

**H**aving seen his advised oilseed rape area drop from 2,764ha in 2014 to just 610ha in 2017, Essex-based Andrew Blazey is familiar with the challenges facing growers – and why some are moving away from the crop.

A mixture of flea beetle and drought has caused widespread crop failure across his patch in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire over the past two years, while slugs are an ever-present threat.

Although there is never a guarantee of overcoming these issues in every situation, Mr Blazey has identified several ways a farm's oilseed rape establishment system can be made more resilient and give the crop the best chance of success.

**Start from the bottom up** – Good soil structure and nutrient status are fundamental ingredients for rapid establishment. Consider starter fertilisers containing nitrogen, phosphate and potash, either pre-drilling or banded with the seed.

**Variety choice** – Varieties with good autumn vigour should be selected to minimise the time taken to grow past the vulnerable cotyledon stage. Mr Blazey prefers hybrid over conventional seed for this reason.

**Establishment method** – Moisture retention and fine tilth for optimum seed-to-soil contact is essential. Sub-soiler seeders do a good job, but can be crude. Ensure they are fitted with low-disturbance legs and wings to minimise soil boil.

**Consolidation** – With slugs an almost ever-present threat, firming up the seedbed post drilling is essential. Pressing and rolling or even double rolling is advised where conditions allow.



**MADELEINE ALEXANDER**  
INDIGRO

**W**orking across Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Cambridgeshire, Madeleine Alexander has oilseed rape crops in the heart of the flea beetle hotspot, to just on the periphery.

The small-seeded crop is inherently difficult to establish without added pest pressure. Since the withdrawal of neonicotinoid insecticide seed treatments, Ms Alexander has seen flea beetle populations increase significantly.

She suggests growers start with getting soils just right and gives some additional tips to get the crop up and growing away from danger as quickly as possible.

**Prepare early** – Soil conditions are key and there is very little time between harvest and drilling rapeseed, so correct any significant compaction or drainage issues ahead of the previous cereal crop. Choose an early maturing cereal variety for a timely entry and ensure a fine, even straw chop at harvest to reduce subsequent slug pressure.

**Consider seed treatments** – Fungicides prochloraz and thiram can reduce seed-borne phoma and damping off, while nutritional seed treatments can help accelerate germination, emergence and establishment.

**Drilling date** – Early August to mid-September is the ideal window, but good seedbeds are more important than calendar date. Sow into a moist, fine and firm seedbed to encourage rapid growth through good seed-to-soil contact.

**Apply slug pellets** – Treat at drilling where thresholds are met and consider using a ferric phosphate-based pellet where possible to avoid metaldehyde reaching ground and surface water.

**Flea beetle sprays** – Monitor flea beetle in volunteers and yellow water traps. Treat the pest with a pyrethroid when thresholds are met and consider spraying at dusk onwards when the adults are most active.

# Tips for successful spring cropping

There is a continuing shift to spring crops as growers add diversity into their rotations to improve soil health, spread risk, ease autumn workloads and tackle grassweeds. Here, two AICC Members offer some advice for successful spring cropping.



**DAVID LINES**  
SUNNYRIDGE  
AGRONOMY

**H**erefordshire-based David Lines says spring crops such as potatoes, maize and spring barley have always featured heavily in rotations in western England.

But where farms have shifted away from spring crops to a rotation dominated by winter-sown options, grassweeds such as blackgrass and brome have crept in and he has advised his clients to act decisively to halt their propagation.

Re-introducing spring crops is a key part of his strategy and Mr Lines says growers should seek varieties that provide high output and/or a potential premium and look for wider rotational benefits, too.

Spring wheat and barley are obvious high-output choices, while Mr Lines has seen an increase in spring beans this year, at the expense of peas after two late and difficult harvests.

"We are growing high-yielding pale hilum varieties such as Vertigo, so there is the chance of a premium and the bonus of extra residual nitrogen for the following crop," he adds.

Mr Lines also likes spring linseed, which can be drilled late to maximise out of crop control of grassweeds and graminicide Centurion Max (clethodim) offers an effective post-emergence option for blackgrass.

"Linseed roots break up the soil nicely too, so offers a good entry into winter wheat direct-drilled into the stubble and premiums are about £50/t over oilseed rape."

In the west where livestock and mixed farming is widespread, he urges growers to consider stubble turnips ahead of any spring-sown crops for rotational benefits.

"It is the same as any cover crop, so captures nutrients, improves soil structure and can be rented out for grazing at £75-£100/ha, which provides some extra income," says Mr Lines.



**JAMES RIMMER**  
CCC  
AGRONOMY

**W**hether growing a spring crop for blackgrass control or to spread risk, James Rimmer says growers should be clear why they are adopting a spring crop, as it will impact on crop choice.

He also urges growers to talk to end users and fix premium outlets as early as possible.

"Spring malting barley is perhaps the go-to option for those with grassweed issues, as it provides a good gross margin if you can achieve the quality, but you also need to manage expectation.

"Don't over extend yourself by aiming for a specification you can't achieve."

Spring milling wheat varieties such as Mulika can also provide an attractive premium and despite few herbicide approvals for spring oats, Mr Rimmer likes it as a cropping option.

He says oats do not carry the take-all pathogen, so offers a break of sorts, and the crop also appears to produce an allopathic effect to suppress grassweeds and minimise seed return.

"It is critical you have the optimum plant stand for crop competition and there are some good varieties that can achieve gt/ha on the right land, for half the variable costs of winter wheat," says Mr Rimmer.

In any grassweed situation, he stresses the importance of focussing on cultural control. Over-winter ploughing and stale seedbeds – followed by low disturbance drilling – are advisable. Optimum plant establishment and population are critical.

Mr Rimmer says where growers have clean fields, spring seed crops can offer good returns. He has had recent success growing vining pea seed. "You need to look at all market opportunities," he adds.





"DON'T OVER  
EXTEND YOURSELF  
BY AIMING FOR  
A SPECIFICATION  
YOU CAN'T  
ACHIEVE."

# Prepare your farm for post-Brexit cropping

Agriculture will be taking a step into the unknown when the UK leaves the EU, But there are several ways arable producers can ensure their business is resistant to any future shocks, say two AICC Members.



**PATRICK STEPHENSON**  
ARABLE ADVISER/  
NIAB

While it remains unclear how Brexit will impact on farming, Yorkshire-based Patrick Stephenson believes significantly less financial support from the government is almost a certainty.

To prepare for this, he is advising his clients to assess all parts of their business, address any unprofitable areas and get on a stable footing over the next two to three years.

He says many combines have been creating yield maps for years, but the information has been underutilised and now is the time to use the data to pinpoint areas not suitable for cropping without subsidy.

"Farms are set up with big kit that can cover huge areas quickly, but is there any point in trying to work into those awkward corners or headlands yielding just 5t/ha over 10 years?"

"Those areas aren't going to improve, so perhaps they would be better left uncropped?"

Where land is taken out of production, Mr Stephenson believes grass will offer a good option and environmental schemes are likely to be included in any future UK agricultural policy.

"These options might not work for growers in eastern England with Grade 1 soils, but for those with livestock or more marginal land they could be useful, as you get the best out of productive parts and get something back from the worst," he adds.

“Many combines have been creating yield maps for years, but the information has been underutilised.



**NICK WALL**  
CROP  
MANAGEMENT  
PARTNERS

Based in Hampshire and advising across the southern counties of England, Nick Wall urges growers to seek out opportunities to increase revenue and efficiency ahead of Brexit.

He is already seeing clients forging closer partnerships with neighbouring businesses, while others are investing in machinery to cover a likely increased demand for contracting from smaller farms or converting buildings for commercial use.

Smarter marketing of grain will also be crucial, says Mr Wall, with tighter links with local premium markets and ensuring every tonne has a home will reduce risk for the producer.

"There's an opportunity to supply local livestock producers with protein and feed, too. Some are looking at soya and lucerne, as they are less risky in the southern climate," he adds.

Costs will need to be scrutinised and addressing agronomic problems such as blackgrass – which results in a hefty herbicide bill and saps yield – will play a part in reducing spend.

Measures such as rotational ploughing and more diverse rotations including spring crops can help reduce the grassweed burden and make the whole cropping system more efficient, explains Mr Wall.

"Soil improvement and resilience is also key and growers should look for cost effective sources of organic matter and use cover crops, which we are getting better at implementing in different situations."

"In addition, look to grow less risky varieties that require fewer chemical inputs," he adds.

Mr Wall highlights the importance of engaging with the public and politicians in the run-up to Brexit too, ensuring the issues facing farmers are understood as future policy is being shaped.

"Get them on farm and help them understand the issues and hopefully they will fight our corner."



# How AICC Members acquire products through buying groups



### CROP ADVISORS

Based in the south of England, Crop Advisors are passionate about ensuring their farmer clients get the best technical advice and the recommended products are purchased at the best possible price.

The business goal is to drive down prices as much as possible, to achieve the most cost effective deal – therefore ensuring clients are buying inputs as low as the market will allow. "When comparing costs with farms that source their requirements through the more traditional route the savings can be anywhere between 10% and 30%," says managing director Emma Martin.

Crop Advisors was established in 2000 by Alan Bide, one of the first independent agronomists in the industry. It was recognised that if all independent agronomists in the South of England could collaborate, the combined purchasing power would be of huge benefit to their clients, and hence the buying group was formed.

Today, Crop Advisors is owned by Emma Martin and Howard Nason and is the largest specialist arable buying group in the UK working with 22 AICC agronomists and purchasing arable inputs on 250,000 acres across the South of England. [www.cropadvisors.com](http://www.cropadvisors.com)



### AGRICURE

Agricure is a specialist agricultural buying group focussed on purchasing agrochemical, seed and fertiliser for 91,000ha predominantly in the arable heartland of the UK. Designed to support independent agronomists and their clients, Agricure has developed a bespoke IT

package to enable real time pricing, administration support and a time saving system.

The team of agronomists focuses on the technical requirements of the group and uses the forecasted volumes to negotiate price and guarantee volumes. The group is technically focussed, agronomy led, truly independent and secures products on competitive terms with real-time pricing. Bespoke software simplifies administration and efficient purchasing can be controlled by the agronomist with a friendly support and back-up service. Transparent, competitive procurement maximises returns for clients. [www.agricure.co.uk](http://www.agricure.co.uk)



### AGRITEK

Agritek is a purchasing agency for clients of Crop Management Partners LLP, which has been established for 18 years. It procures on behalf of clients agrochemicals, fertiliser, seed and fuel and operates a completely transparent service. It does not take any commissions from suppliers. Agritek plans product requirements with input from clients and the 12 agronomists from Crop Management Partners. Agritek orders products from clients' preferred distributors for next day delivery and negotiates invoice prices and rebates with suppliers on a quarterly basis. Savings normally range from 5% to 25%. [www.agri-tek.co.uk](http://www.agri-tek.co.uk)



### J.K.SENIOR & SONS

The J.K. Senior buying group was set up in 1969 to complement its technical service. Having decided on the technically

correct solution, J.K.Senior & Sons then looks for the most competitive price of the active ingredient on the market. Only chemicals on the current Approvals List are considered.

Fertilisers were added to the buying group in 1989 and cover nitrogen (English, imported, liquid and urea), straight phosphorus (P), straight potassium (K) and compounds.

During 1998, cereals, legumes and oilseed rape seeds were added to the buying group covering all varieties. Competitive and transparent pricing generates savings of up to 20%, with a dedicated and experienced admin team, fast computerised ordering system and monthly invoice checklist. Staff are BASIS, FACTS and ICM qualified. Analysis of average annual spray costs is available online, with access to a members' area and other useful apps. Buying group members can also benefit from a 15% discount on Spalding's purchases. [www.jksenior.co.uk](http://www.jksenior.co.uk)



### FARM ADVISERS LTD

Farm Advisers Ltd was established in 2004. There are six AICC Independent agronomists advising on 40,000ha in the West Midlands/Marches area, who are involved in all aspects of arable crop production. Farm Advisers currently only sources agrochemicals on behalf of its clients. Early product planning and forecasting ensures that all clients are assured of supplies of appropriate product at the correct timing – without having to compromise on product choice. Members order chemicals from a number of national distribution companies on behalf of their clients. Product availability and prices are updated on a regular monthly basis to ensure that clients benefit from competitive pricing and supply of products.

## The following non-AICC led groups support independent agronomists:

### ANGLIA FARMERS

Anglia Farmers has a buying power in excess of £250 million. Staffed by specialists with an in-depth knowledge of their product area, it secures savings across a range of products and services while offering an unparalleled level of service and support. [www.angliafarmers.co.uk](http://www.angliafarmers.co.uk)

### FRAM FARMERS

Fram Farmers provides the purchasing, grain marketing and administrative function for over 1400 UK farm businesses. It acts as an extension to the farm office, with industry professionals purchasing and marketing core agricultural inputs and outputs on behalf of members. [www.framfarmers.co.uk](http://www.framfarmers.co.uk)

### WOLDMARSH

The Woldmarsh team works hard to procure goods and services at preferential prices with all benefits negotiated on agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, chemicals, seed, fuel and electricity passed directly back to members. [www.woldmarsh.com](http://www.woldmarsh.com)



# ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CROP CONSULTANTS

DELIVERING COMMERCIALY INDEPENDENT ADVICE TO GROWERS



AICC's own academy, funded by AICC, backed by the industry



Independent & individual  
means strength



Associated &  
together means power



Association of Independent Crop Consultants

Call us on **01730 823881** or visit our website **[www.aicc.org.uk](http://www.aicc.org.uk)**