Oats – a grower’s perspective
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Robert Law has been involved with the growing of oats for every harvest since 1972, when as a 12 year old school boy he remembers being fascinated by a crop that was taller than him at the time and was a real rarity! From helping on a farm that grew 8 hectares of oats 44 years ago he has progressed from school, agricultural college, farming scholarships abroad, working on and managing farms in England to building up his own farming business which extends to 2,100 hectares. The oat area that he is involved with has in that time multiplied by some 37 times to its present level of 300 hectares or 7% of his farmed area.

The farming business is centred on the Hertfordshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire county borders. Arable crops occupy 75% of the farmed area while grassland used to support a 2,500 ewe sheep flock makes up the balance.

The growing of oats on the farms has been, and continues to be, an essential part of the farming system. They act as a valuable break crop for other cereal crops and help to reduce the levels of soil borne diseases and pests. All oats grown on the farms are under contract with some 80% grown for milling while the remaining 20% are grown for seed.

The emphasis for the future growing of oats on our farms is very much on improving quality and increasing field yields as well as the percentage of the crop that makes an end oat product from the volume of material harvested off the field. This is being achieved by better plant breeding, on farm trials and the pooling of knowledge between like-minded growers.

Notes