Managed well, oats have the potential to be a high-yielding break-crop for growers. Current estimates of average oats yields for the 2015 harvest (ADAS Harvest Reports) are 6.2 t/ha, slightly above the final defra estimate for 2014 (6.0 t/ha). However, the 9.3 t/ha average yield of the control varieties in the 2014/15 AHDB Recommended List Trials shows there is potential for growers to make more of the crop.

There are opportunities throughout the season for growers to optimise inputs to maximise yields. Fertilisation is one such area. Current guidelines for Nitrogen fertiliser recommend a maximum of 140 kg N/ha, but recent research has shown that this may be an underestimate and that optimum Nitrogen rates are often over 200 kg N/ha. Optimising other nutrients is also important to maximise yields. Potassium is a significant element for oats since it is important for straw.

A key challenge often cited for oats is grass-weed control. Although there are a number of chemicals authorised for use in oats to control weeds such as blackgrass, cultural control methods are also useful tools. Growers should consider rotations, siting the crop and how they prepare the seedbed.

Growing oats should certainly be considered for a wide range of situations. However, there are some agronomic and physiological questions which, if answered, could help growers understand the crop and maximise output.