



Winter Cereals

Sustainability in Action



PLANNING

PLANNING FOR PROFITS

Planning for profit is important with all crops. Winter wheat, due to the unique timing of field operations, requires special attention to maximize opportunity to produce profitable results. Experienced winter wheat growers plan ahead to consistently achieve successful results from their crop.

▶ Crop Rotation and Planning for Stubble

Planning begins when spring crop decisions are being made, as the spring crop's seeding date will have a strong influence on availability of stubble for fall planting. Planning to have stubble available for the September 1st to 15th seeding window is step one towards a successful winter wheat crop.

Canola is the most popular stubble crop for winter wheat. It offers good weed sanitation, an early harvest and adequate stubble, all of which are critical to successful winter wheat production. Winter wheat must be direct seeded so that the stubble can trap snow, insulating the crop from harsh winter conditions.

Long-time growers typically have a contingency plan to ensure available stubble. Polish canola, barley or forage stubble are a good alternative as they can be seeded later and still provide stubble as they are early maturing crops. For further information on spring crops and seeding dates, see the Weatherman-ager at wintercereals.ca. This model predicts harvest dates for spring crops at varying seeding dates for areas across Prairie Canada, producing scenarios for available stubble suitable for winter wheat seeding.

▶ Harvesting the Stubble Crop

Best results are obtained when winter cereals are direct seeded into standing stubble. Harvest operations should be conducted to leave the tallest stubble possible. Straw and chaff should be spread in a wide swath to avoid seeder plugging, emergence problems and nutrient immobilization. Harrowing prior to seeding is not recommended as it breaks down stubble. Experienced growers also avoid excessive traffic on the field when harvesting to limit compaction and damaging stubble in high traffic areas, such as field edges and approaches.

The snow trapping potential index (STP) can be used to identify if sufficient stubble exists to trap snow. An ideal STP prior to seeding is 40 or greater, to result in a post-seeding STP of 20 or greater.

$$STP = [\text{stubble height (cm)} \times \text{standing stems per m}^2] \div 100$$

▶ Logistical Planning

Winter wheat seeding operations often overlap with the harvest period for spring crops so good logistical planning is required.

Preparing seeding equipment prior to harvest will save precious time during a busy fall. Having fertilizer and seed available and on-farm can also save time. If on-farm storage is not feasible, arrangements should be made for cleaning or pick up of seed, as well as confirming fertilizer will be available when needed. Growers may even have their seeding equipment field ready with seed and fertilizer on board, so seeding can start before trucks are needed. Trucks to supply seed and fertilizer are often the limiting factor when seeding, so utilizing hopper bins, seed wagons or borrowing trucks may streamline seeding.

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▶ Seeding Opportunities

Finding the time to seed winter wheat during the fall harvest can be a challenge for new growers. Experienced growers find there are enough stoppages in harvest to seed without abandoning the combine. Damp mornings or stoppages due to rain make for perfect seeding opportunities. Also, GPS-assisted guidance makes seeding after dark feasible when it is too tough to harvest. After the initial year of growing winter wheat, growers find that the subsequent harvests are more spread out, easing the pressure of seeding the following winter wheat crop.

▶ Spring Stand Assessment

Stand assessment should not be conducted until spring seeding is almost complete i.e. around May 20th to 25th. This gives winter wheat time to regrow while still allowing time to reseed, if necessary. Brown plants are not necessarily indicative of a dead plant as leaves and roots can die off over winter. Winter wheat regrows from the crown, so dig up plants on a warm day and inspect the crown tissue. White colour and new white root growth is a positive sign of plant survival. The optimum plant density for winter wheat is over 20 plants per square foot. Research shows that stands with 8 plants per square foot can still yield almost 50 bushels per acre if managed appropriately. This is likely due to winter wheat's tremendous ability to tiller.



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Did You Know?

When planning your winter wheat crop there is a tool available to help you predict previous spring crop maturity. Check out the **Weatherman-ager** at wintercereals.ca

Key Points to Planning for Profit

- Have the first fields seeded in spring be the crops to precede winter wheat.
- Choose early maturing varieties of the spring crop.
- Direct seed into standing stubble.
- Be aware of post-seeding STP.
- Book seed and fertilizer early and have it on farm.
- Have equipment serviced and ready to seed.
- Seed during the optimal window for your area.
- Capitalize on opportunities to seed during harvest delays.
- Don't wait for rain.
- Wait to assess winter wheat until all spring seeding is complete.
- Look for new root growth and healthy crown tissue.

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of

Ducks Unlimited Canada and Bayer CropScience for the future of agriculture includes a stewardship model that recognizes the agricultural productivity of farmland while retaining and improving the habitat available to North America's waterfowl and other wildlife.

Call 1 866 384 DUCK (3825) or visit wintercereals.ca