

VarietyView

Introduction

We have been enjoying meeting many of you at the summer shows and events, which are still taking place as we write.

Such occasions give us the chance to show some of the innovations we are bringing to the market, share our hopes for them and get some initial feedback on their prospects.

They also allow us to celebrate achievements. Our winter oat variety **Mascani** being awarded the Niab Variety Cup at the Cereals Event in June was a real milestone moment and we were delighted to receive such an accolade.

Although financial and political uncertainty is weighing heavily on the farming industry at the moment, our new winter barley varieties have been very well-received and the place for pulses, oats and other break crops in sustainable rotations is recognised.

We are also pleased to have a new winter wheat, **Hector**, coming through the RL system and hope to see it recommended later this year.



Mascani
WINTER OAT



As the new cropping year looms, Senova is delighted to report a new managing director has been recruited. George Goodwin is joining us in July from Elsoms, where he held both technical and commercial roles over a few years.

With harvest not far away and another cropping year to consider, it's a busy time for most. We look forward to helping you with your seed requirements for harvest 2026.

Hector
WINTER WHEAT

Coming up...

Apart from Hector, our promising new feed wheat with high yields and strong disease resistance, we also have other varieties in the pipeline.

An early glimpse of our candidate winter oat **Rannoch** and candidate spring oat **Nova** was possible at Cereals.

Rannoch offers slightly higher yields than existing choices and a very good crown rust resistance rating of 8, while Nova has a mildew resistance rating of 8.

We are now keeping our fingers crossed for another good set of harvest results. We'll keep you posted on their progress.

Rannoch
WINTER OAT



Nova
SPRING OAT



Kitty gets off to a flying start

Our new two-row feed winter barley variety Kitty is selling well ahead of the new cropping year, thanks to a compelling combination of agronomic features which includes protection from soil-borne virus.

A Valerie cross, **Kitty** joined the AHDB Recommended List 2025/26 at the end of last year, one of three new high performing winter barley varieties from Senova.

With a treated yield of 104, Kitty sits just behind the top yielders on the list. However, a yield of 108 in the North region makes it the joint highest for this part of the country, while an untreated yield of 91 shows its potential for lower input regimes.

Its other outstanding features are the highest specific weight on the list of 72.7 kg/hl – something that growers are always seeking – and resistance to both strain 1 and strain 2 of Barley Yellow Mosaic Virus (BaYMV).

That gives it a unique position as one of only two varieties to offer this level of virus protection. It comes from having two resistance genes – *rym4* and *rym5* – which give it defence against both known strains of BaYMV.

Until recently, strain 1 of BaYMV dominated in the UK, so the *rym4* resistance found in most winter barley varieties was effective. That changed when strain 2 was confirmed in the UK, which the majority of winter barley varieties don't carry resistance to.

Despite being classed as resistant they have started showing symptoms – with 2024 being a particularly bad year.

Strain 2 was first identified in the south-west of England, with researchers believing that it has spread from there to soils in other parts of the country where barley is grown. As there are no chemical control options, genetic resistance is the only form of defence.

Currently, the only two recommended winter barley varieties with both resistance genes are Kitty and **Valerie**, a feature which has been highlighted on the latest Recommended List so that growers can make informed choices.

"The yield loss from BaYMV can be as much as 40%," reports Senova's Hugh Harley. "It's a soil-borne virus, so it is difficult to detect and even harder to determine which strain or strains are present."

Infection has also shown to affect grain quality, he adds, with higher screenings and lower specific weight often reported. "The weather often dictates how much virus is seen in any particular year but it has certainly been a feature of the last two growing seasons."

Kitty's other attributes include short, very stiff straw and good disease resistance ratings, including a 7 for Rhynchosporium.

In addition, the lowest brackling score is a welcome addition to such a good all-rounder, as it avoids stem weakness problems higher up the plant as the crop matures.

Not surprisingly, there has been plenty of early interest in Kitty, as it has immediate appeal to those growing feed barley.

"We know that many barley growers prefer two-rows and we are really pleased to have such a strong variety," says Hugh.

"Varieties like Kitty really challenge some of the existing barley choices as they help to minimise risk and control costs."



Kitty
WINTER BARLEY

Kitty: David Lawrie – a grower case study

A 9 ha crop of Kitty being grown for seed last year yielded 11.1 t/ha, giving an additional 0.5 t/ha over Scottish grower David Lawrie's previous seed crops.

Winter barley works well in the farm's rotation, he says, as it is the first cereal crop to harvest, with the grain then being taken straight to Alexander Harley Seeds.

"Their premises are just ten minutes away, so the barley goes straight from the field to their handling facilities for processing," he explains. "It works very well for us."

Predominantly a dairy farm, the 270 milking cows at Cuthill Towers Farm are housed year-round. As a result, the land is in an arable rotation, with ground coming out of four years of grass creating clean fields for growing new varieties for seed.

Given the availability of slurry, the soil's organic matter and fertility are very good, points out David, helping crops to fulfil their potential.

"Winter crops can struggle a bit up here but the Kitty was drilled in September in good conditions, so it came through and got going before the weather turned.

"I wish I could say the same for the wheat."

Otherwise, it was treated similarly to previous crops, he recalls. "Getting a good seedbed is important and we find that the previous grass ley helps with that. We use a plough and combination drill to establish crops as soon as there's a window."

This year he has almost 18 ha of Kitty in the ground. "It's gone in well again and we've been able to get some slurry on it, so fertiliser use has been lower. There's always a risk of lodging on high fertility sites, so we've kept an eye on it as the season has progressed."

He adds that two-row winter feed barley varieties have changed beyond recognition. "We're seeing good results from the more recent introductions. It was a really nice surprise to exceed 11 t/ha."

Barley Yellow Mosaic Virus

Barley Yellow Mosaic Virus can persist in the soil for many years and affects winter-sown varieties.

Once plants are infected, there is no control method available. Symptoms show in early spring, following a cold spell, and infection occurs in distinct patches. These patches increase in size in successive years.

The first signs are small yellow patches – seen from February onwards – with leaves going on to develop streaky yellow look.

Infected plants are stunted and mature later.

High risk factors include previous infection, movement of infected soil and growing a susceptible variety.

Winter Beans: on the brink of a breakthrough?

Our market-leading winter bean varieties, Vespa and Vincent, continue to top the PGRO Descriptive List and dominate the market, even though the national area of pulses is down.

Adding depth to our offer, we also have **Norton**, an early, high yielding variety and a new winter bean, **Ninja**, which is a short and early maturing type.

While SFI payments are still on offer for companion cropping and the use of legumes for nutrient management for existing agreement holders, the industry is waiting to see which direction the revamped SFI will take and what it will mean for pulses.

Until there's more clarity, it seems that winter wheat is likely to be prioritised this autumn. That puts the spotlight on the role of winter beans in resilient and sustainable farming rotations, filling the much-needed break crop option that oilseed rape has vacated.

Winter Beans – what's the potential?

Expanding the area of homegrown pulses will help reduce agricultural emissions and could replace a significant proportion of the imported soya bean meal in livestock feed, show calculations by the Farm Carbon Toolkit.

These emission reductions come from reduced fuel use, no need for fertiliser, an inherent fertility benefit for the following crop and providing an alternative to the 2.37 million tonnes of soya feed that is imported from South America.

If 50% of imported soya is replaced by beans, this move would cut feed emissions to 4.5 mt CO₂e, saving 2.8 mt CO₂e compared to current levels.



Oatstanding Mascani

Mascani
WINTER OAT

We are over the moon that our winter oat variety Mascani has won the 2025 Niab Variety Cup, in recognition of its outstanding contribution to crop productivity and commercial success.

Awarded at the Cereals Event, the Variety Cup acknowledges exceptional varieties and can be drawn from the entire spectrum of horticultural, ornamental and agricultural crops.

It is only presented in years when a variety is considered to have had a major impact, with the last award being made in 2023.

Mascani is the first oat variety to receive this accolade. Bred by IBERS, Aberystwyth University and marketed by Senova, Mascani has dominated the winter oat market since its commercial launch in 2004.

Now in its twenty-first year on the AHDB Recommended List, Mascani continues to stand the test of time and deliver for the supply chain. It remains the top-selling winter oat variety, with over 70% of the UK winter oat market.

That success can be attributed to its combination of superior grain quality and performance in the mill, along with its reliability in the field and suitability for sustainable rotations.

Appealing to both end users and farmers alike, Mascani's success has spearheaded the increase in UK-wide oat plantings and boosted development work into alternative oat markets, as the health and nutritional benefits of oats have been recognised.

"As a result, we now see oats being eaten at different times of day to just the traditional breakfast occasion," says Hugh Harley of Senova.

"You only have to walk into a supermarket to appreciate the vast array of products that use milled oats, from health and convenience foods to free-from choices and dairy substitutes."

For millers, Mascani's high kernel content of 75.2% and good specific weight of 53.4 kg/hl are matched by low screenings, while in the field its strong disease resistance and good standing ability have made it a low input variety.

Although it isn't found on the Recommended List, there is also another characteristic that millers look for, as it reduces the losses that can occur during the milling process. Often referred to as hullability, it describes the ease at which the husk can be removed.

"In the mill, the husk has to be separated from the groat," continues Hugh. "It's a physical process and some varieties hull well, while others don't."

Where this process doesn't occur easily, losses can be high. Millers' experience with Mascani over a number of years shows that it always comes in at an acceptable level, keeping costs down and improving mill efficiency.

"Given its length of service and the continued demand for the variety, it is fitting that Mascani has been recognised in this way," he adds.

"As well as its widespread uptake, it has had an instrumental role in bringing the health benefits of oats to consumers."

Weed control

Pre-emergence herbicide **Liberator** was approved for use on winter oats last autumn at a rate of 0.3 l/ha.

Cromwell
WINTER OAT

Tipped to carry on from Mascani, our winter oat variety Cromwell is establishing well in the market – giving growers another option and reducing the reliance on a single variety.

A Mascani cross, **Cromwell** offers higher yields and better standing ability, as well as bringing an 8% yield advantage over its stablemate.

