

Establishment techniques

Summary

- Good establishment techniques are important for brassicas, more so than for pasture, because of their low sowing rates.
- Plant population has a large influence on crop yield, so seed coatings such as *Agricote Brassica* can be an important to the success of a crop.

Pre-sowing

Brassicas can benefit from following another crop, such as a short term ryegrass or cereal. Usually the paddock in question was selected for a brassica because of problems with fertility, drainage, pests and/or weeds. Sowing another crop first can address these issues, and can provide a better, less turfy seed bed for brassicas when the time comes to sow them. Longer term, new pasture sown after the brassicas will benefit from reduced pests and weeds, especially grass weeds like browntop. It can also be a good idea to apply insecticide when spraying out old pasture.

Cultivation

When sowing into cultivated paddocks, a fine, firm, weed-free seedbed is essential. Bury previous crop or pasture to reduce the risk of disease or pests. Seed should be sown shallow (no more than 10 mm) to ensure good, even establishment of the crop. A level seedbed with good consolidation can greatly help achieve an even sowing depth.

Seed coating

Direct drilled crops are likely to have higher pest pressures. Coating seed with *Agricote Brassica* will reduce the risk of crop damage during the early stages of establishment.

Direct-drilling

When direct-drilling brassica crops, a thorough herbicide application is required to minimise weed competition, especially in the seedling stage. Nitrogen fertiliser requirements are likely higher as N is tied up in decaying vegetation. Also, insecticides should be used to minimise insect pressure, as the dead vegetation is an ideal haven for brassica insect pests, particularly springtails and slugs. It is important to remove as much turf as possible before sowing through hard grazing.

Weed control

Weeds must be controlled from the outset as they compete strongly with brassica seedlings. Pre-emergent herbicides can be incorporated into the seedbed pre-sowing.

Weeds can also be a real problem in second year crops, e.g. fathen, red shank and nodding thistle in kale. These are best controlled in the first year crop by stopping their seeding.

Monitoring insects and diseases

Pests can cause serious damage to brassica crops, during establishment and through the life of the crop. Monitor crops daily for the first 14 days after emergence, and then weekly. Information on pest and disease identification is given on pages 133 to 148.