

# Strip drilling kit lifts OSR yields

Using a subsoiler and seeder unit to establish oilseed rape is a system increasingly used by growers. **Piers Welkin** reports

**Y**ou can plough, cultivate and drill it, you can min-till it, or you can simply broadcast the seed on the ground. Oilseed rape has, over the years, endured some different approaches when it comes to methods of establishment.

But is there now a recognised system that is relatively cheap to execute and likely to provide not only a successful establishment of the crop but also ensure a growth pattern that will result in acceptable yields?

Opico believes there is, and it's a system that is now being increas-

ingly adopted by UK growers – placing the seed behind the leg of a subsoiler as it is pulled through the soil and then pressing the ground. Used successfully in a wide range of soil types and conditions, its one flaw may be an inability to work effectively in heavy soils in dry conditions – the limited till produced and deep cracks for seed to fall in do not provide a good start.

In less extreme conditions though, the logic is clear: the subsoiler loosens the soil to a reasonable depth for the roots to travel down and also lifts some moist soil in which the seed can germinate.



Opico's oilseed rape drilling combination with its subsoiler, fertiliser and seed distribution units, plus the new Synchro roller.

The following press helps to ensure seed-to-soil contact.

Nothing too startling there but Opico, in an attempt to maximise results, has set about refining the system, not least by giving it a name – till-seeding.

With the rows as much as 55cm apart, the company has decided to adopt a band sowing approach so the area of ground between the rows is left uncultivated and, through use of a new design of rolls, is not even pressed.

According to managing director James Woolway, it makes little sense to apply a blanket fertiliser to ground that is not supporting a crop.

"There are two issues here," he says. "First, growing oilseed rape in wider rows means there is greater light access to help fill seed pods on the side of the plant; the second is that confining fertiliser placement to just the growing sites results in less weed pressure."

Opico's oilseed rape planter comprises a subsoiler, a press, along with a seed applicator and a fertiliser distributor.

In terms of development, the newest component is the press unit, which, to accommodate the band working principle, has been designed to consolidate only the sown rows.

Called the Synchro Roller, the bands are pressed by rubber tyres and, in the spaces between the tyres, there are smaller diameter T-profile metal rings, which only have something to do when a large clod comes their way.

Seed is delivered to the area behind each of the subsoiler legs by a pneumatic Variocaster and liquid fertiliser is applied from a Nitro-Jet dispenser

## OSR ESTABLISHMENT COSTS/HA COMPARED

Direct drilling:	£44.50
Till Seeding – stubble cultivator:	£33.80
Till Seeding – subsoiler:	£40.50
Min-Till:	£125.20
Plough-based system:	£156.60

and placed in the same band.

Adopting the band growing system has also led to some savings in both seed and fertiliser. With seed, it now becomes seeds a row metre rather than seeds a square metre and the recommendation is to aim for about 25 seeds sown a row metre for an establishment of about 14 plants. This equates to a seed rate of just 1.5kg/ha.

For fertiliser, a blanket application of 15kg/ha of nitrogen equates to a 40kg/ha rate when concentrated in the bands, which can either be seen as a saving or, in Mr Woolway's opinion, better use of fertiliser. "Oilseed rape will not grow towards nutrient," he says. "The nutrient needs to be placed to have the best results."

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Oilseed rape in wide rows – now a common sight in the UK. Opico takes the system one step further and claims there are cost savings to be had by treating the crop in bands.