

Case study: Chris Dowse, Hall Farm, Lincolnshire



The mixtures have been created to provide **food and cover for grey partridges and seed food for other farmland birds.**

Awkward field corners identified by the estate staff have been taken out of crop production. Our cultivations are done as we prepare land for our spring crops. We use a commercial seed mixture from a game cover specialist, which costs us £46 per acre (£115 per ha). We use 70kg of N, mainly to feed the kale. We often have to spray to control flea beetle. We have used sweet clover in the past, but this swamped the mix, so we will avoid using it again.

Sources of further information

RSPB Arable Farmland Adviser:
01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk/farming

Smiths Gore – Farm Management
01962 857405
www.smithsgore.co.uk

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group:
024 7669 6699
www.fwag.org.uk

The Game and Wildlife Conservation
Trust: 01425 652381
www.gct.org.uk

Visit www.farmwildlife.info to:

- Post your questions and ideas on the discussion forum
- Read case studies of how farmers are benefiting wildlife
- Find out about events and courses in farm wildlife conservation
- Use the comprehensive list of links to other websites concerned with farm wildlife conservation

RSPB regd charity in the UK no 207076
In Scotland no SCO 37654



Wild bird seed mixtures



*How to integrate wildlife benefits
into your farming business*

Why create wild bird seed mixtures?

The decline of yellowhammers has been linked to a shortage of seed food through the winter. Wild bird seed mixtures are an unharvested mix of seed-bearing crops that will benefit species such as grey partridge and yellowhammer.

This option also provides cover for gamebirds if you have a shooting interest. It holds the highest density of birds of any habitat on the farm through the winter, so providing a **wildlife spectacle for you and your visitors to enjoy**.

The cost-benefit analysis opposite shows that the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) payment means it is marginally less profitable to grow a hectare of wild bird seed mixture than it is to grow a hectare of wheat, if you take into account the savings in fixed costs. However, **over the course of an agreement, the lower gross margins of other crops in the rotation will put the net profit of ELS wild bird seed mixtures in the black.**



What you can do

Research suggests that two hectares of wild bird seed mixture per km² (or 100 hectares) is sufficient to provide seed food for birds through the winter.

You can put these in awkward field corners, but **site the mixtures away from woods** to attract seed-eating birds of open farmland and to minimise the risk of predator attacks. Also **do not site them on unproductive areas** – the field corner option may be more appropriate in such areas.

Cereals are a useful component for buntings, and brassicas are useful for finches. A mix of cereals and broad-leaved crops will also benefit gamebirds and other seed-eating birds.

Use the optimal amount of fertiliser, and protect the crop from weeds, pests and diseases if required to achieve a good yield of seeds.

These crops are normally sown in the spring, but if spring crop establishment is not possible, then crops can be established in the autumn to provide winter seed food in the following year. It is useful to have such crops staggered so that seed food is available every winter.

Economic analysis

(by Smiths Gore farm management)

The analysis compares a hectare of wild bird seed mixture and a hectare of winter wheat.

	Winter wheat	Wild bird seed mixture
Income from crop	£1020	
Income from ELS		£450
Variable costs	-£420	-£159
Savings in fixed costs		£295
Net margin	£600	£586
Change in net margin		-£14

Assumptions:

Winter wheat yield: 8.5 t / ha

Winter wheat value: £120 / tonne

Variable costs of option spread over 5 years: £200 (seed every two years), £99 (establishment - disc £22, power harrow £32, drill £30, roll £15), £9 (1 hour knapsack spray injurious weeds)

For further details and help in doing your own calculations, visit

www.smithsgore.co.uk/publications