

2015 WINNER:
MELANIE JENKINS



Dairy leaders to hold fresh talks with Morrisons

Morrisons has agreed to hold fresh talks with dairy industry leaders after farmers protested at two of its milk distribution centres over falling prices.

A massive turnout of more than 500 farmers at Morrisons' distribution centre in Bridgwater, Somerset, led to board director Martin Jones phoning Farmers For Action (FFA) chairman David Handley and agreeing to a meeting with the FFA and NFU.

FFA chairman Mr Handley told farmers gathered at the protest: "This meeting will be in respect to your demands and nothing else. We want to make it clear that we are not their slaves and they are not our masters."

The protest saw a huge crowd of men, women and children outside Morrisons' distribution centre on Thursday night (6 August), with tractors and farm machinery preventing lorries from going in and out for about five hours. It took place at the same time as a second demonstration outside another Morrisons depot in Middlewich, Cheshire, attended by NFU president Meurig Raymond.

Some of the protesters present were Becky Robertson and Nick Thompson who started the milk trolley challenge. "We based it on the ice bucket challenge," said Miss Robertson. "We wanted it to go viral the same way and I think it has made a huge impact towards tonight. I am so proud of how other farmers have taken it up."

Mr Thompson added: "I just want to help the younger generation to have a future. Without us there is no future for farming, and without farming, we have no future."

Despite Morrisons' capitulation, farmers were keen to emphasise the urgency of the problem. "We don't have long to turn things around," said James Hole, Somerset representative of the FFA. "It is not a matter of weeks or months, we literally have days. Our roots and our future are what we are fighting for."

Mr Handley added: "We have been bullied enough and there is only one way to treat a bully, smack him back between the eyes. Farmers should not be carrying debt so that Morrisons can maximise their profits."

"There are to be no more protests against Morrisons until the meeting with them next week but we will be back if they renege on any deal. In the meantime there are still plenty of other retailers to have a go at."

Article written for Farmers Weekly news desk



2015 RUNNER-UP: **SAM DEANE**



OSR emerges into a 'blitz' of disease

Light leaf spot (LLS) comes into winter oilseed rape crops earlier than was previously thought. Dr Neal Evans of Weather Innovations Network (WIN) reports that crops are potentially "awash" with ascospores from the moment they emerge from the ground.

"We have a summer blitz in LLS spores, where harvesting of the previous year's crop releases spores," he says. "So there's masses of wind-blown fungal material in the environment as early as August."

This is because LLS has a polycyclic lifecycle, so it produces asexual spores on the leaf during the growing season, but also produces sexual spores on crop trash and leaf litter. These spores are wind-dispersed to recently drilled crops in August and September.

"Historically we thought they weren't released until late September or early October," says Neal Evans. But analysis of spore populations, carried out as part of a project funded by AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds and Bayer CropScience, has now revealed spore-dispersal slots right at the start of the OSR growing season.

Despite the early entry of the fungal disease into crops, it doesn't become visible until later on in the autumn, however. "LLS goes through a latent period during which it's very hard to spot it in the crop," he notes.

"But while LLS is not limited by heat in early autumn, it is limited by moisture." Then as the autumn progresses, rainfall events drive the disease epidemic within the crop.

Bearing this in mind, Prime Agriculture agronomist Andrew Blazey likes to focus on blackgrass and phoma stem canker control earlier in the autumn and save fungicides with greater activity on LLS before winter closes in.

"Since there's an antagonistic relationship between carbetamide and prothioconazole, I prefer to tank-mix other products with early applied Crawler," he says.

"This leaves prothioconazole free to be used later on when LLS comes to the fore, allowing growers to get the maximum impact from this active ingredient. But the weather can close down and scupper the best of intentions."

Trying to juggle propyzamide applications along with foliar-acting fungicides late in the autumn can be something of a challenge, admits William Charlton of Bayer.

"But growers are better off making a late prothioconazole application than none at all. With no late autumn fungicide application, OSR crops are left open to LLS for as long as five months, resulting in severe pressure on crops by the spring," he adds.

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