

Options for replanting milling wheat

Background

Wet conditions throughout winter 2025 have created challenges for growers across Canterbury. Some growers may have autumn sown wheat paddocks with drowned out patches, while others may not have been able to sow the milling wheat they hoped to plant in late autumn.

This has resulted in a number of enquiries around planting autumn milling wheat cultivars in spring and options for re-planting drowned out areas within paddocks. FAR has contacted milling wheat breeders and South Island mills to discuss this issue and been advised the following.

1. Can I spring sow the milling wheat seed I originally planned to sow in May/June?

Milling wheat cultivars have varied vernalisation requirements (exposure to cold temperatures to go reproductive). If your cultivar is facultative, it will have a low to no vernalisation requirement, so it can be sown over a broader period without needing exposure to cold to become reproductive. These cultivars perform well from spring sowing. If your cultivar has an obligate requirement (needs vernalisation), it may not get sufficient cold exposure from spring sowing to trigger reproductive development. Ask your seed company if you are unsure about your cultivar.

2. What can I do if I need to re-sow drowned out areas?

You can fill in drowned out patches with spring sown milling wheat, but there are a few things you'll need to consider to ensure the best outcome.

- Pick a cultivar that doesn't have a vernalisation requirement.
- Pick a cultivar that has an earlier maturity, so both cultivars ripen more evenly.
- Pick a cultivar that is in the same grade.

For example, if you have a paddock of 'Duchess' that has drowned out areas, they can be sown with 'Reliance'. 'Reliance' can comfortably be sown in spring, although the earlier the better. Both 'Duchess' and 'Reliance' are premium milling wheat cultivars, and the early maturity of 'Reliance' means the cultivars should ripen at around the same time. Be aware that 'Duchess' and 'Reliance' have different thresh ability, which may challenge combine settings. Another option could be to plant more 'Duchess' which is also facultative, although it will need sufficient late irrigation to finish it. The South Island mills will accept the resulting mixture of cultivars, but only if grain quality specifications are met and they are from the same grade. Check with your mill if you are in this position before you sow, as they may have a preferred cultivar.

3. What about feed wheat?

If your partially drowned out autumn sown feed wheat is going directly into the feed market, similar rules apply. Pick an earlier maturing spring cultivar that will ripen at around the same time. This may be a medium grade milling wheat, as it is more likely to have a facultative vernalisation requirement, making it suitable for spring sowing. Keep an eye on the resulting mixture over spring, as milling wheat cultivars tend to be more susceptible to disease than feed wheat cultivars. The mills will not accept mixtures of feed and milling wheat cultivars. This strategy is not suitable for certified crops.

Communication

If you take up any of these options, make sure you inform your mill with the contract number of tonnages that may be affected. Likewise, if you'd prefer not to re-establish a washed-out crop, you will still need to notify your mill with the relevant contract numbers and tonnages.

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