

Does Spending More on Wheat Deliver a Better Margin?

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Across our Harvest 2025 winter wheat benchmarking data, the highest-spending farms did not achieve the highest gross margins.

At first glance, that might seem surprising. After all, additional spending on fertiliser, crop protection and seed is usually intended to protect yield, manage risk and maximise crop performance.

The more useful question, however, is not whether some farms spent more than others.

It is:

What did that additional expenditure actually deliver?

As Harvest 2026 decision-making begins and plans for Harvest 2027 take shape, understanding the answer could be as important as any individual benchmark figure.

The Short Answer

Spending more has not reliably meant earning more.

Across the last ten harvests, higher variable costs have not consistently translated into stronger gross margins. In most years, yield remains the strongest driver of performance, but expenditure, marketing and management decisions all influence the final result.

Most importantly, a single season rarely tells the full story.

Good businesses can have disappointing harvests. Equally, a strong result in one year does not automatically indicate a strong farming system.

Looking Beyond The Benchmark

These findings come from WW Intelligence, Wilson Wraight's farm benchmarking and management intelligence service.

Benchmarking is valuable because it highlights differences in performance. But identifying a difference is only the beginning.

The more important step is understanding why that difference exists.

A simple benchmark might show that one business spends more than another. Management intelligence helps determine whether that difference was justified, whether it delivered value and whether any change is actually required.

Did Additional Agronomy Spend Pay?

Looking across the Harvest 2025 winter wheat data, the highest-spending growers incurred almost £300/ha more in variable costs than the lowest-spending growers.

That additional expenditure was associated with higher yields, but not enough additional output to recover the extra cost. The result was a lower gross margin.

Importantly, this should not be interpreted as an argument for cutting inputs.

Every farm operates under different conditions. Additional expenditure may be required to manage disease pressure, preserve quality, reduce risk or respond to specific agronomic challenges.

The key point is that expenditure alone is not a measure of success.

What matters is whether the money spent delivers sufficient value in return.

Does Soil Type Change The Picture?

One of the first questions raised when reviewing the results was whether the higher-spending farms were simply operating on more demanding land. That is a fair challenge.

Soil type influences establishment, crop potential, disease pressure and agronomic decision-making. A comparison across all farms therefore risks confusing differences in circumstance with differences in management.

To test whether the relationship remained visible in more comparable circumstances, we repeated the analysis within one of the largest broad soil groups in the dataset.

Harvest 2025 Winter Wheat - Medium Soils

	<i>Lower Input Spend</i>	<i>Higher Input Spend</i>
<i>Variable costs</i>	£486/ha	£768/ha
<i>Yield</i>	7.33 t/ha	7.54 t/ha
<i>Average sale price</i>	£170/t	£184/t
<i>Gross margin</i>	£760/ha	£615/ha

Even within this broad soil group, the farms that incurred substantially greater costs achieved only a modest yield advantage and ultimately produced a lower gross margin.

Soil type is only part of the story. Many businesses farm a mixture of land, while a “Medium” classification can encompass different characteristics depending on location, cropping history and the land used for wheat in that season. Most businesses in the dataset are based in East Anglia, with others across parts of the South East. This is therefore a useful contextual comparison rather than a perfect like-for-like assessment.

Even with that limitation, the comparison shows that broad soil type alone does not explain the relationship between expenditure and margin. Nor does it prove that the additional agronomy decisions were wrong.

It highlights where the more useful management questions begin:

- What justified the additional expenditure?
- What benefit was expected?
- Was that benefit ultimately delivered?
- Could the same outcome have been achieved more efficiently?

This is where benchmarking becomes management intelligence.

What Really Drives Wheat Margin?

One of the analysis's strongest findings was the combination of yield and price.

In a relatively stable season, yield explains far more of the difference in gross margin than most other factors.

However, when farms with similar yields are compared, a different picture emerges.

Businesses achieving broadly comparable yields can still produce very different margins. At that point, agronomy, expenditure, marketing decisions and operational efficiency become increasingly important.

Which is why price deserves particular attention. Over a longer timeframe, movements in wheat price have had as much influence on gross margin as many of the production variables that receive far greater scrutiny. Understanding that relationship requires analysis across several harvests rather than a single season, and it is a question we will return to in a future WW Intelligence article.

The lesson is not that yield, nor price, is everything.

The lesson is that the question changes depending on where performance sits.

Be Careful Drawing Conclusions From One Year

Harvest 2025 also provides a useful reminder of how dangerous it can be to make long-term decisions based on a single season.

Oilseed rape delivered some very strong financial results in 2025 and, on many farms, outperformed winter wheat.

Yet looking across a longer period shows that relative crop performance changes significantly over time. A crop that appears highly attractive in one season can look far less compelling only a few years later.

That does not mean the 2025 result should be ignored.

It means it should be viewed in context.

Rotation decisions should be based on a combination of profitability, risk, soil suitability, workload, establishment potential and longer-term performance rather than the most recent year's winner.

The Bigger Lesson

The most successful farm businesses are rarely those chasing last year's result.

They are the businesses that consistently review performance, challenge assumptions and understand what is driving their numbers.

This is why benchmarking remains such a valuable management tool.

Not because it tells you where you rank.

But because it helps identify the questions worth asking next.

Questions Worth Asking Of Your Harvest 2026 Figures

As plans are made for Harvest 2027, consider:

- Where did your wheat yield sit relative to expectations?
- How did the price achieved compare with the wider market opportunity, and what influence did that have on the final margin?
- What did each additional pound of variable cost actually deliver?
- Are any performance differences explained by circumstance, or by management?
- Is this result part of a longer-term pattern or simply a one-off season?
- If one crop performed exceptionally well or badly, is that enough evidence to alter the rotation?

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that spending more on wheat does not reliably guarantee a stronger gross margin.

Even when farms are compared within similar soil groups, higher expenditure did not automatically translate into better financial performance.

That does not mean spending less is the answer.

It means understanding what the expenditure achieved is far more important than the expenditure itself.

A benchmark identifies the difference.

Management intelligence helps explain why the difference exists.

That is where the most valuable business decisions are usually made.

The WW Intelligence team works with farming businesses to place their own results alongside this evidence and understand what is driving the outcome, not simply where it ranks.

Anyone interested in how their Harvest 2026 results compare can start a conversation through the [Wilson Wraight contact page](#), email tyork@wilsonwraight.co.uk, or call 07498 162581.