



Guidance on Erucic Acid in Farm Saving Oil Seed Rape

Importance of Erucic Acid

The majority of rape grown in the UK is of the double zero type which is suitable for human and animal consumption. These varieties are low in erucic acid, which is a naturally occurring monounsaturated omega-9 fatty acid contaminant present in vegetable oil. It is not a safety concern for most consumers as average exposure is less than half the safe level, although there may be an increased health risk to children up to 10 years of age (according to the European Food Safety Authority).

Erucic enters the food chain when rapeseed oil is used in industrial food processing and home cooking.

Oilseed rape contracts stipulate a maximum of 2% erucic acid, but rapeseed oil can be used in the food industry up to a 5% level. Currently, rapeseed loads are rejected over 5%, and loads between 2% and 5% can incur price penalties.

The European Commission is considering tightening the food standard to a maximum 2%, which the UK would most likely concur to.

Whilst there have been generally low levels of erucic acid in rapeseed, these have been creeping up over the past few years leading to price penalties and rejections of oilseed rape loads. There are a number of possible reasons for this including previously having grown HEAR, weed contamination and a possible link to levels in seed.

In 2018, the National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC) Seed Processing Members advised customers to start testing for erucic acid prior to processing and drilling oil seed rape seed. This pilot scheme highlighted a percentage of seed that was subsequently not farm saved, to avoid the additional risk of a financial penalty at the sale of the crop, due to raised levels of erucic acid.



This guidance aims to assist farmers considering farm saving oil seed rape.

It provides pragmatic solutions to try and avoid high levels of erucic acid in the crop and the risk of financial penalties or crop rejection. It should be used alongside other industry measures, such as [NFU guidance](#)* to take a responsible approach to reducing the levels of erucic acid in the crop.

Your NAAC Mobile Seed Processor can assist you through the process: www.naac.co.uk

*<https://www.nfuonline.com/erucic-acid-timeline-v9-12-10-17/>



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It is sensible to consider the following before farm saving oil seed rape:

1. Identify where you plan to farm save seed. Avoid fields where HEAR rape has been grown previously in the rotation. Volunteers can last for an estimated 15-20 years so you need to consider the history of the field.
2. Avoid farm saving seed from fields where high levels of erucic acid have been recorded in previous crops.
3. Inspect the crop regularly and ensure weeds and volunteers are absent in the crop. Remove volunteers between rows.
4. Store and manage any seed for farm saving separately at harvest.
5. Get seed tested for levels of erucic acid, prior to farm saving. NAAC Processors can carry out the test and the cost is approx. £50-£60 per batch (+VAT).
6. Your seed processor can carry out the sampling, but key points are to:
 - take samples from many points (minimum of 10 but ideally more) in the batch of seed or heap as the erucic acid content can vary widely within a bulk of oilseed rape seed;
 - Use a sampling spear if possible, to sample from different depths in the batch of seed;
 - Mix the sub-samples together thoroughly to form a composite sample. Take the final sample from the composite sample and keep one back on the farm in case of any query.
7. If results are over 0.5% erucic acid, then you are advised not to farm save the seed, as there may be an increased risk of a higher percentage in the finished crop and therefore a risk of rejection or financial penalty.
8. Retain a sample of the seed and identify the original certification number, variety and field. This may be needed should any issues arise. The seed processor will also retain a sample of the seed.

