

SOWING OILSEED RAPE IN OCTOBER?

‘RUNNER types’ are the result of selective breeding between winter and spring oilseed rape. These new types combine the hardiness and yield potential of winter oilseed rape with the low vernalisation requirements of spring oilseed rape. The varieties classified as RUNNER types progress through the physiological stages more quickly than winter oilseed rape, enabling later sowing dates and earlier harvests. Learn more about the initial growing experiences from Hungary and Eastern Europe.

Rising summer temperatures, changing rain-fall patterns with late rain periods, a shift in phenological development phases, and increasing pest pressure can significantly affect oilseed rape cultivation: temperature peaks during and after flowering, which jeopardise pod development and ultimately yield. New oilseed rape types from RAPOOL-Ring GmbH may offer a solution. These are a combination of winter and spring oilseed rape – the ‘RUNNER types’.

Precision trials in several Eastern European countries are now providing initial findings on the new RUNNER types. A comparison with winter oilseed rape hybrids revealed that, when

sown later, these varieties develop faster early growth, earlier flowering and earlier maturity. The resulting advantages are shown in Fig. 1.

In Hungary, the 2024/2025 growing season provided the first opportunity to test the new RUNNER types by involving a small group of professional farmers (30 farms). The aim of the field trials was to shift the oilseed rape sowing date away from the August and September heat and to complete yield formation in the following year before the July heat expected here. The focus was on specifically adapted crop management and the possibility of early harvesting. These field trials were accompanied by precision trials on small plots.

The advantages of late sowing

Trials were conducted in Hungary across a wide sowing window at three different times: early September (standard sowing), late September / early October and the last week of October. On the final date, sowing took place directly into maize stubble on two farms. The results showed:

- When sown at the standard time (usually the first week of September in most regions), RUNNER types offer no economic or technological advantages compared to winter oilseed rape.
- When sown approximately three weeks later, there were hardly any differences in yield.

FIG. 1: COMPARISON OF GROWTH BETWEEN WINTER OILSEED RAPE HYBRIDS AND RUNNER TYPES WHEN SOWN LATER



RUNNER TYPES – WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Similar to hybrid wheat, which is a combination of winter and spring wheat, the RUNNER types now offer a combination of spring and winter oilseed rape. The first RUNNER hybrids have already been approved: SCHUMACHER (in France) and FANGIO CL (in Hungary).



However, “autumn production costs” were significantly reduced, as no growth regulator was required and only one crop protection treatment was needed instead of four.

- When sown very late, in the last week of October, the RUNNER types achieved exceptionally high yields of 3.3 to 3.7 t/ha, some of which were significantly above the annual national average yield in Hungary of 2.7 to 2.8 t/ha.

Based on the one-year results currently available, it can be confirmed that RUNNER types should be sown 2 to 4 weeks later than the ‘standard’ winter oilseed rape sowing date (early September in Hungary) – considering the prevailing conditions (precipitation, temperature). Sowing in mid-October or the second half of October may, depending on weather conditions, be more at risk from early frosts, lower soil temperatures and fewer hours of sunshine, which represents an increased risk. However, a very important advantage of later sowing was the significantly lower pest pressure, which helped to reduce autumn costs.

Oilseed rape following maize – new crop rotation options?

Following the positive results from the first year of the trial regarding the sowing date and confirmation of the benefits of delayed sowing, the trial was continued. A new crop rotation approach was adopted, involving the sowing of oilseed rape after maize in October 2025.

Current experience shows that sufficient rainfall after the maize harvest is necessary for the RUNNER types to emerge well. Maize generally leaves the soil very dry, whilst this is well suited to tillage and the sowing of oilseed rape, rain is needed for good field emergence. In the field trial last autumn (2025), there was sufficient rainfall, so that although the stands appeared ‘small’ during pre-winter development, they

grew just as well as in the sowing time trials the previous year.

Hungarian farmers are now considering growing a second-crop maize following RUNNER types, as the oilseed rape harvest can take place significantly earlier and is threshed as early as June. An exciting approach that will be pursued further.

Seeding rate: same as for spring oilseed rape or winter oilseed rape??

Whilst the sowing rate for spring oilseed rape varies considerably and depends on the time of sowing (in some cases exceeding 80 germinable seeds per m²), the sowing rate for winter oilseed rape is significantly lower, at 30 to 50 germinable seeds per m². In the field trials, the seed rates for the RUNNER types were also varied depending on the sowing date.

In the 2024/25 growing season, both the optimal sowing rate of 70 germinable seeds per m² (derived from plot trials) and the standard sowing rate of 45 to 50 germinable seeds per m² were tested. The results from the first year show that, under optimal conditions, high sowing rates do not necessarily lead to higher yields; however, they have positive effects at lower yield levels and under extreme stress.

For Hungarian farmers, a sowing rate of 50 to 60 germinable seeds per square metre has proven to be a good compromise between plant distribution and sufficient soil cover. For late sowings (late September/October), a sowing rate at the upper end of the range is recommended. An optimal sowing rate for single-seed sowing has yet to be determined. So far, it is advised to set the sowing rate at the lower end of the range.

A young segment, further field trials to follow

The present experience with the RUNNER types is based on a few years of field trials in Hungary and at individual sites in Eastern

Europe. Although the initial results are promising, further experience needs to be gained in order to fully exploit the potential of RUNNER types in cultivation and crop rotation. There are still further research questions to be addressed, such as how growth regulator and fungicide strategies can be optimised in the spring. Furthermore, an adjustment to the fertilisation strategy may be necessary. Here, for example, splitting the application between autumn and spring fertilisation would be advisable. Alternatively, the requirement could be met using stabilised fertilisers as early as the autumn. This needs to be tested in further trials.

Conclusion

The RUNNER types tested in Hungary are the first combinations of winter and spring oilseed rape to be launched on the European market. This new type bridges the gap between spring and winter oilseed rape. It enables farmers to grow high-yielding oilseed rape in regions where winter oilseed rape is no longer economically or can only be grown at great risk to yields. This is confirmed by initial field trials in Hungary. Overall, Hungarian farmers’ experiences with the RUNNER types have been very positive, so that cultivation is gradually evolving from strip and trial planting into a genuine operational alternative.

Further evaluation is required before considering introduction into markets such as Germany. First, the crop-growing potential, limitations and growing conditions for local farmers must be properly assessed. Only then can it be determined whether growing these varieties in Germany makes sense for farmers.

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