

GROWING CHICKPEA IN THE UK

Chickpea is a nitrogen-fixing legume producing food-grade seeds rich in protein and fibre. With 60,000 tonnes imported each year there should be a ready market for UK-grown chickpea if quality and price are competitive, and if cropping can fit with standard rotations. However, there has been virtually no UK-focused breeding or agronomy to date.

Niab led 'Cicero', a Defra-funded feasibility study, with partners Premium Crops, Place UK and Viridian Seeds.

'Cicero' had three broad aims: i) trying to grow chickpea reliably and profitably; ii) comparing available varieties for UK suitability; iii) starting to breed new UK-adapted varieties. Across 2023 and 2024, we:

- Established basic agronomy principles: weed control, sowing and harvest date, planting rate, crop inputs;
- Began to understand yield component traits;
- Kickstarted new breeding populations;
- Screened diverse material in the field to identify traits;
- Initiated smart breeding approaches, including induced variants, genome sequencing and predictive quality testing.

Conclusion

Routine UK chickpea cropping will require earlier varieties to reliably deliver good yield and quality from mid-September harvest, supported by end-user contracts.

Next steps

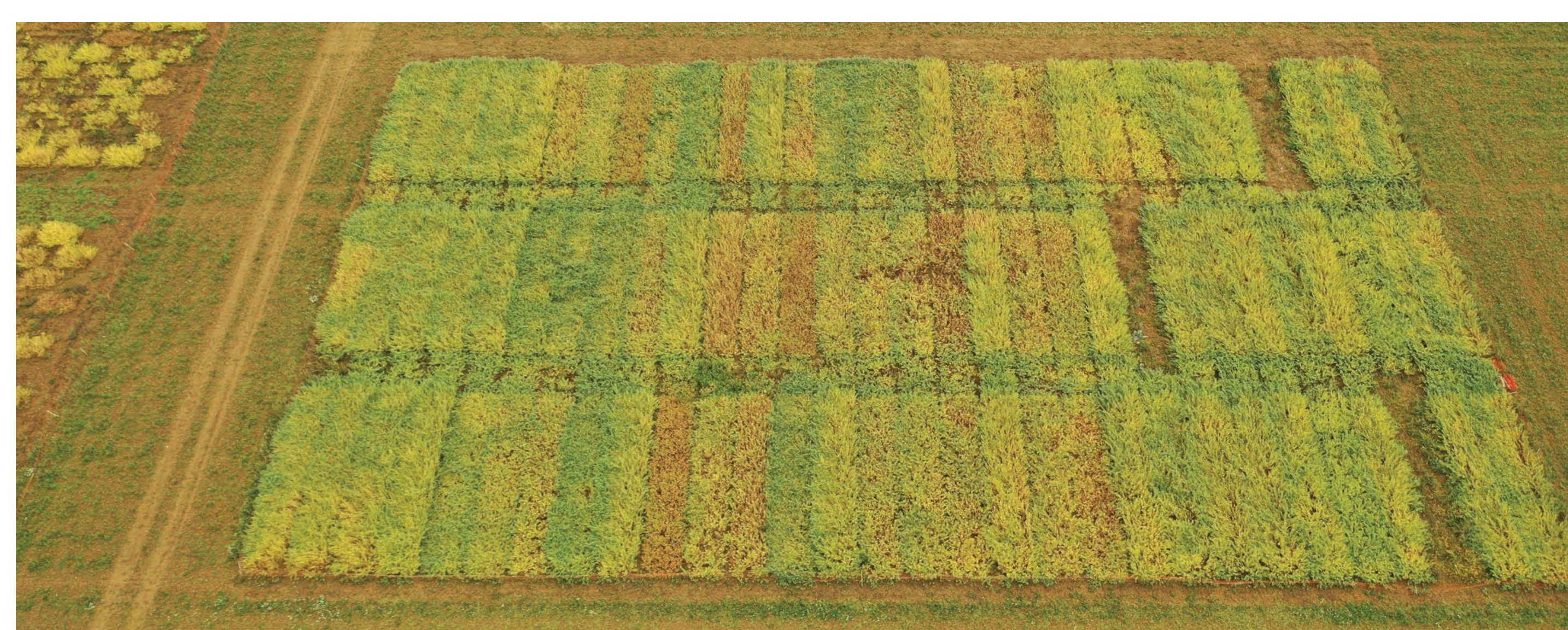
2025 trials confirmed that hotter, drier seasons can deliver excellent yields and grain quality (Figure 1). Niab will continue targeted breeding, working with supply chain partners. A new Defra ADOPT project ('ChiEFS': Niab, growers David White and John Pawsey, retailer Hodmedod's), will i) try to advance harvest through agronomy; ii) quantify the impact of chickpea on rotations; iii) explore new processing approaches.

Figure 1. 2025 yield uplift exaggerated by earlier drilling

Trial	Drill date	Harvest date	Duration (days)	Avg yield (t/ha)
1 Niab	4/5/23	17/10/23	166	2.00
2 Niab	8/5/24	4/10/24	149	1.70
3 Cambs	26/4/24	18/9/24	145	1.14
4 Lincs	2/5/24	19/9/24	140	1.18
5 Niab	10/5/25	26/8/25	108	2.41
6 Cambs	14/3/25	15/8/25	154	3.95
7 Cambs	31/3/25	26/8/25	148	3.23



On-farm tests of sowing rate/drilling date interactions, Place UK August 2024



Seed rate (left), variety (centre) and herbicide trials (right), Niab September 2024



Harvesting Niab yield trials, August 2025



Cleaning high quality samples from Niab 2025 trials

'Cicero' was a 'Farming Futures R&D Fund: Sustainable farm-based protein' award; 'ChiEFS' is an 'ADOPT (Round 2)' award; both funded by Defra's Farming Innovation Programme, managed by Innovate UK