

31 August 2023

General Comments

Issues with splitting and low germination are being reported, with one or two spring barley reports as low as 80%. Potatoes are now being burned down – blight is about as you would expect at this point in the season. Sooty moulds have been common as a direct result of the weather and the slow harvest. New season oilseed rape is emerging well but is at risk from slugs which have thrived over the summer.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

Harvesting of spring barley has commenced with the early ripening and lower yielding bere and brage varieties. Some conventional types have also been combined for crimping. The bulk of the spring barley which is intended for prop corning looks 2–3 weeks away. There is some uneven ripening apparent which is attributable to extra late tillers produced because of warm, wet weather after the long, cool spring. Grass is still plentiful, and farmers are hopeful the ground will remain firm to enable it to be grazed and tuned into kg's of beef rather than trampled into a muddy quagmire.

CAITHNESS

Spring Barley harvest did get underway in the period but was swiftly stopped in its tracks. A lot of Spring Barley has been sprayed off while Spring oats around the area is looking well ahead of last year. Hay and silage look to be pretty much completed while grassland looks plentiful for the time of year. Swedes and forage rape looking far better of the recent rainfall.

INVERNESS

Harvest is well advanced in the Inverness area, with past two weeks seeing good dry harvest conditions across most of the area. With only the last few days turning wet. Spring barley harvest will be around two thirds complete. Yields are reported to be reasonably good considering the challenging growing season. There have been some quality issues, with high skinning levels seen in some areas. Early sown winter barley is now through the ground having been sown in excellent conditions. OSR sowing is also under way in generally very good soil conditions.

ABERDEENSHIRE

The challenging weather has continued over the past few weeks causing interruptions to harvest operations. When weather has permitted, ground works for winter crops have continued. As with throughout the season, spring barley crops remain varied in growth stage, with the earliest of crops harvested. Many spring barley crops have recently been desiccated or are ready to desiccate in the next few days. Yield and quality reports for both winter and spring crops have been very mixed.

BANFF & BUCHAN

Harvest progress is somewhat slower than local farmers would like. Winter wheats have ripened off and in most cases are being taken while growers have had to play the waiting game for spring barleys. With varying reports in terms of quality from intakes, spring barley crops are seemingly very slow in ripening compounded by the prevalence of secondary growth which can vary from farm to farm, field to field and even within a field. Growers are left with the quandary of whether and when to spray with glyphosate and do they look to target the first crop, the second crop or somewhere in between, potentially trading quality for yield. With the differential between malting barley and feed barley increasing, making the right call will make a huge difference to profitability. In addition, couch grass and AMG seem to be more prominent following the wet July. The wetter summer has resulted in soils retaining plenty moisture meaning that oilseed rapes are being sown into good conditions with warm soils seeing crops emerge quickly to face the twin barrage of flea beetle and slugs. Hopefully crops will continue to make good progress and race through their vulnerable stages although vigilance will be required in the interim. Potato crops are all chopped down with lifting to begin imminently. Second cuts of silage are all but complete with aftermaths greening up again fairly quickly. Livestock farmers are beginning to take cattle inside for finishing with their places in the fields being taken by the first of the feeding lambs appearing on farm.

ANGUS

Catchy weather has made combining crops a stop start affair. Overall, yields are OK, but certainly not up to last season's highs. New season OSR has been sown where the crop rotation has allowed (after WB), but is still to be established in many cases after SB. Grain driers are busy, and many growers are experiencing issues with high grain skinning.

PERTSHIRE

Harvest continues to be a stop/start affair with a lot of harvest remaining as we enter September month. Wheat harvest continues mostly on a par with other years, but spring barley is much later than recent years. The main talking point is secondary growth in spring barley, if they should be sprayed off and if so then when. Much more spring barley has received glyphosate this year than for many years and even with the aid of glyphosate it is often taking more than two weeks from application until combining. Winter oilseed rape established after winter barley is off to a flying start with crops at 2 or 3 true leaves, some of which are now needing volunteer cereals to be controlled. However, there is a considerable amount of oilseed rape just recently drilled or still to be drilled as they await spring barley to be cut and straw to be cleared.

FIFE

Very stop start harvest due to rain and un-even ripening of spring barley. Early sown spring barley has been cut but results are very varied with reports of high nitrogen and screenings failing some samples for malting. Winter wheat crops have been cut on earlier ground and yield reports vary from average to good. Winter barleys and oilseed rape seem to have had average yields and quality. New season winter oilseed rape has started to be sown and is germinating quickly, a close eye is being kept on the crops for flea beetle damage. Hopefully a more stable spell of good weather is heading our way to allow crops to ripen and harvest to progress more steadily.

STIRLINGSHIRE

Harvest of the spring crops is well underway in between rain showers. Most crops are standing well. There are still a few fields of winter wheat to complete but these will be finished quite quickly. Winter oilseed rape is just at its first true leaf, most being direct drilled into stubble. Germination and establishment in these crops look good. Ploughing is underway for winter barley and wheat. Hay/ silage is almost complete, but quality will be down.

LOTHIANS

A deterioration in weather over the final week in August has interrupted harvest progress once again. The weekend of the 24th of August saw a heavy band of rain moving across the region leaving over an inch of rain in its wake in places (e.g Gifford 27.8mm). Prior to this, good progress was being made in wheat and oats and despite daylength shortening, combines and balers were putting in long days and covering good ground.

The recent rains mean a lot of that straw is still in the row together with bales yet to be lifted. Wheat specific weights look to be lower than last year with higher screenings likely given the extended dry period in the early summer. Spring barley is being managed almost on a field-by-field basis depending on the degree of secondary tillering and number immature ears. Many spring barleys will be cut late in September this year by the time their ready and its very likely both skinning levels and germination will be affected. How this affects premiums has yet to be seen. Earliest oilseed rapes are drilled and should come away very quickly in moist seedbeds. Slugs are present so a pre-crop emergence application is advisable. Hay and haylage making have also been compromised by the wet weather with prices already being adjusted to reflect the lower stocks of good quality forage.

BORDERS

65mm of rain in the last 2 weeks, is making for a stop start harvest. Good progress has been made on winter wheat, however heavy showers are making for high moisture contents and difficulty baling straw. Reports are that yields are about average. Quality on spring barley remains an issue, with reports of high screenings and skinning, which is caused by heavy showers followed by drying. Secondary tillering has made decisions on when to spray crops off difficult. Many crops contain a high percentage of secondary tillers which are still at late milk stage.

The decision on how to manage these crops should be made on a field-by-field basis. Drilling of oilseed rape continues, with many crops already through the ground. Slug pressure is high, particularly on fields which have been direct drilled.

LANARKSHIRE

The weather remains turbulent with sunshine between showers. Recent weeks have seen severe thunderstorms in some parts of Lanarkshire. As ever farmers are resilient and are managing to complete harvest operations when the weather allows. Many farms have decided to whole crop barley fields this year due to the growing conditions. In terms of livestock, sheep sales are well under way with records being broken at Lanark market with a tup lamb reaching 170,000 guineas.

AYRSHIRE

August has been a dryer month in Ayrshire, but despite this spring barley crops have been struggling to ripen. Many places have sprayed off their crop to help aid ripening and hope to get on with combining soon. The dryer weather mixed with a bit of heat has helped grass growth in the region and we are seeing a few third cuts being cut this week.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

The weather has been very changeable over the past three weeks. Harvest in the region is near complete with only a small proportion of spring barley left to combine. Overall harvest 2023 has been very disappointing and a year to forget. Spring barley crops have been averaging 1.5t/acre with the better yields being reported at 1.75t/acre. Straw yields have also been very disappointing. Recent grass growth has been exceptional with many still harvesting silage. There was a concern during the early summer that there would be a shortage of silage, but this will not be the case. Forage crops have also had a great start and are growing away very well.

STRANRAER

Harvest is largely complete for cereals in the Southwest with a mixed bag of results in terms of yield and quality. Many spring crops suffered from secondary growth due to dry weather and yields of grain and straw will be behind on average years. Grain drying costs will also be significantly higher this year. The weather has remained quite catchy as thoughts turn to planting for next year and inevitably with intermittent harvest has an impact on the delivery of new seed. Silage cuts are still under way and grass growth is good for this time of year so it is anticipated silage pits will be sufficiently full for the winter. A real contrast in spring bean crops depending on sowing date with some of the earlier sown crops already harvested for wholecrop, albeit disappointing and later sown bean crops still in full foliage.