

15 February 2024

General Comments

Winter crops are variable and where ground cover was low when autumn flooding hit, erosion and crop damage has often been significant. Autumn operations were often impossible *in wet conditions so there might be some catch up required on weed control and autumn light leaf spot sprays where they were missed. There are very few reports of pests or diseases around the country in cereal crops. In oilseed rape, light leaf spot is already established in trial plots, and it could be another curative season for the disease.

Regional Comments

CAITHNESS

Continual wet weather has left most fields waterlogged with the majority of spring work still to be started. Winter crop is looking very well as even though there have been high rainfall temperatures have been fairly good. Fertiliser costs are still at the forefront of most minds. Fodder supplies are good with many sellers struggling to find buyers for hay and silage. This is mainly due to an imbalance now, with more stock numbers reducing and increased fodder making on these farms. Straw prices are holding up well.

MORAY

During this winter period there has been what seems like an unprecedented amount of surface water lying in some parts of the county. In these areas ground has been too wet to travel on, so preparing the ground for spring sowing has been difficult or impossible. Winter wheat crops range from two leaves to early tillering stage whilst winter barley crops are at mid tillering. There are traces of mildew to be found on older leaves in both wheat and barley. Winter oilseed rape crops are generally looking well at about eight or nine leaves with some showing the usual signs of light leaf spot. The closed period for bagged fertiliser in Moray NVZ area comes to an end next week (20th February) but ground conditions and low soil temperatures will delay any applications. Amongst all the gloomy wetness, carrot crops that were strawed down are being lifted.

ABERDEENSHIRE

The wet weather continues – what can we say? A spell of dry weather at end of January did however see FYM getting spread and ploughs appearing to turn over the soil. Most comments made highlight how surprisingly well the soil has coped with the levels of rain we've had. What's been ploughed so far however is probably freer draining soils. A lot of ploughing is still to be done however and patience will be starting to wear thin for those with large areas still to do. Disease can be seen in most crops at low levels but are not at bad at present. T Sum 200 recording till end of January suggests a fairly average year so far, with 118 accumulated day degrees, at Craibstone but the cold weather last week will have slowed down progress again. Fert Spreaders won't need to be looked out yet for early applications on WOSR, but looking optimistically I'm sure, it won't be long. Seed dressers are out on farm dressing home saved seed and reports from seed testing of spring barley suggests some poor germinations this year. It would be suggested for those that home save seed to check germination and disease levels. Sample bags for sending to SASA can be sourced from your local SAC office.

BANFF & BUCHAN

Just when you think things are improving, we get more rain, meaning that ploughing remains behind where it normally would be. Seeing water lying in stubble fields again does make you wonder what spring barley seed beds will be like, bearing in mind we are only potentially a month away from sowing. Winter crops have held up remarkably well through the winter and with the end of NVZ exclusion period in sight for another year, ground conditions will dictate when the first of the nitrogen will be applied. The wet winter does mean that some adjustments may have to be made to applications due to lower residual nitrogen following some crops. Arable farmers may be like coiled springs at the moment waiting until that moment that the weather improves however some livestock farmers are having to house sheep early due to wet conditions causing damage to grassland creating more work and adding to costs.

FIFE

Wheats are very variable between farms; some have lush green looking crops at GS 23 while the neighbour has very patchy fields at GS13. Winter barleys look very healthy, low incidence of mildew but most crops are at GS24 and a healthy green colour (apart from the areas that sat under water for 2 months). Ground conditions are still sticky, some lighter fields have been ploughed over the last couple of weeks but there are still large areas of stubble to be turned over. Fertiliser applications are being calculated and purchases being made with fertiliser prices lower than they have been for a couple of years.

STIRLINGSHIRE

The rain returns again and again. This has been a particularly wet last few weeks but in general most winter crops are looking much better than they did this time in 2023. There are a few that have suffered badly from the wet and those could have been late sown. OSR was checked by the weather so there has not been much growth in the last few weeks, but it is still green, and it hasn't been too badly damaged by pigeons. Slugs were an issue for some crops of WW to the east of Stirling, but ferric phosphate seems to have done the job here. There are some later sown WB crops that were very small but seem to have now got away okay. There was a worry with the weather conditions how they would cope. On the disease front, all types of winter crops are predominantly clean so not much to update on just now. Some have managed to find a window to get muck spread and have even managed to get some winter ploughing done.

LOTHIANS

Winter rainfall (1st Oct to present) for many areas has exceeded 400mm (e.g. Haddington 408mm, Bush 486mm). Since the New Year the east-west split has seen rainfall typically range from 85mm to 150mm, respectively. Nutrient leaching and soil residual N levels will be of greater concern than this time last year particularly for the autumn established crops as we head toward spring. Whilst not experiencing the big freeze of 12 months ago, many soils are at or beyond field capacity and opportunities to get on the land to finish off winter ploughing have been few and far between. Crop growth stages are behind last year by comparison and nutrient scavenging by the smaller root systems will be less effective as a result. There may well be merit therefore, this year, in phasing in early N applications according to crop development stage. Cereal disease pressure is currently lower than that seen in early 2023 with the notable absence of yellow rust so far and may allow the omission of a TO come the time.

BORDERS

Despite their wet feet from the consistently above average monthly rainfall, winter sown cereal is looking surprisingly green. This is just as well as the prospects of being able to travel and apply nitrogen fertiliser to winter oilseed rape, rye or barley in the next week is very low. Make no mistake all in the Borders is not rosy, the autumn wheat acreage will be less than planned and there are bare patches in late sown wheat crops and some crops will need to be taken out completely. There are still fields to be ploughed. The very tight supply of spring cereals will mean that some may still try to sow winter wheat or end up leaving as fallow. On the foliar disease front rhynchosporium can be readily found in winter barley, septoria in wheat and light leaf spot in rape where many crops did not receive an autumn fungicide or post-emergence herbicide. Let's hope there is better news to tell in the next report.

AYRSHIRE

Not much to report in the region – It has been a wet December and January, and the ground is saturated. The forecast is for rain for the next couple of weeks, so unlikely that ground conditions will improve much for a while.