

14 September 2023

General Comments

For the harvested 2023 crops then, quality issues remain – skinning is common and with a wet, warm summer with plenty of very visible sooty moulds and also field reports, before harvest, of fusarium and microdochium. This, combined with warm grain going into store, can raise the risk of spoilage and mycotoxins, so drying and cooling grain is more important than ever. Winter drilled crops that have gone in to-date have emerged well in moist conditions with slugs and some flea beetle damage being the main reports so far.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

The back is certainly broken on this year's spring barley harvest, with the unusually dry and warm weather allowing a large portion of the crops to be harvested without undue stress. Some high quality bales of straw have been made, however yields are back as the cool spring and lack of rainfall in the summer shortened the straw length. Some of the later sown barley has been sprayed with preharvest desiccant, so hopefully the weather remains favourable as glyphosate will significantly compromise the lands capacity to carry machinery. Grass is still abundant.

CAITHNESS

Well through the harvest in the area these past two weeks with excellent harvest conditions across the area. With combines running late into the night but also getting going early in the day too. A lot of straw has also been baled up. A lot of spring Oats has also been cut. Yields are reported to be good given the challenging growing season in the area. Winter sowing has also been completed in some excellent conditions.

MORAY

The last ten days or so of dry, and pretty hot weather have enabled a huge amount of crops (spring barley & winter wheat mainly) to be harvested with no drying costs at all. Spring barley yields have been about average or perhaps just a bit below for many whilst quality has varied significantly but in general nitrogen levels have been higher and skinning more of an issue than last year. Winter wheat yields have been pretty good whilst not threatening any records. In upland areas of the county there are still fields of spring barley and oats to cut. Next year's winter oilseed rape crops have been established and have emerged into good conditions although slugs and flea beetle have been an issue for some.

Attention has now turned to getting winter barley crops in the ground and again conditions are near perfect. Many producers have also made another cut of silage whilst the sun shone.

INVERNESS

The last week saw ideal harvest conditions in the Inverness area. Warm days and good drying breezes allowed long harvest days which allowed growers to catch up. The harvest will be almost finished across the region. Spring barley quality has been mixed with lighter ground having issues with skinning and nitrogen levels. Yields are good on the whole. Wheat yields have also been good. OSR is through the ground and has established well in the warm conditions. Although the wet weather does mean that slug pellets may be required. Winter Barely sowing is underway this week. Potato lifting is also underway in the region.

ABERDEENSHIRE

It has been a great spell of weather and a lot of spring barley crops are now harvested. Later sown crops require all their time to be ripe, which the sunny weather has at least helped with, but as we enter this week the showery weather has returned. Reports on yields and quality are mixed, as some growers are reporting good yields and quality, but others are having issues with skinnings and screenings. Winter Oilseed Rape crops are emerging well, and most seem past the flea beetle damaging stage as true leaves start to emerge. Although troubling for those waiting to finish harvest, the showery weather is now moistening the ground nicely for establishing winter crops, as there appears to be a lot of ploughing being undertaken. This is also ideal conditions to establish green cover crops, for those that sow them (or need them for EFA Greening purposes!). Later crops of silage have also been taken during the good weather, and seed tattie harvesting has also begun.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The beginning of September saw summer finally arrive with a very welcome spell of hot, sunny weather which continued for the first 10 days of the month. Heavy rain has however now taken its place although not before a good proportion of the spring barley was cut with combines able to work long hours. Progress has been mixed across Banff and Buchan though – earlier areas are almost there, whereas inland areas have still a bit to do. Some crops have started to brackle with some fields of oats also starting to lodge. Yields are decent without breaking records however quality is still giving some cause for concern with skinnings in particular higher than normal although most intakes have moved the goal posts to take this into account. This has been welcomed given the huge differential between the malting barley price and that of feed barley. Moisture contents have been fairly low, often around 15–16% which has meant little drying is needed although the warm temperatures have seen harvested grain also being warmer than ideal, meaning colder air needs to be blown through bulks. Oilseed rape crops have emerged, and the combination of warm weather and warm, moist soils has seen the crops quickly grow past their most vulnerable stages. Attention is now turning to sowing winter barleys and winter wheats. Good progress is being made with potatoes, and feeders are appearing in grass fields to supplementary feed the cattle remaining outside.

KINCARDINESHIRE

A settled and very warm period of weather has seen the majority of the harvest completed in the south and east of the area with the west still with a bit to do. Spring barley has generally yielded surprisingly well. Screenings and skinning levels are variable. Winter oilseed rape is just about all sown and has established well, with little reports of slug or flea beetle pressure. Winter barley is beginning to be sown and some early wheat has also been sown. Ground conditions are good, and crops are going into good seedbeds. Grass is still growing but colder nights in the area will start to slow growth up.

ANGUS

The recent spell of warm and sunny weather has been a welcome relief to growers as they have brought in the last of harvest. Many farms are now complete, with only a handful of growers looking to combine the latest spring barley crops. Overall yields have been strong for harvest 2023, however, quality issues have been significant. Grain skinning and germination are the most common problems, but growers have had to work hard to keep samples clean – both in the combine and through the drier. New season oilseed rape has established well, with the most forward crops now at the two true leaf stage. There has been some flea beetle damage locally, but thankfully the earlier slug pressure has subsided due to the heat.

PERTSHIRE

Finally, a succession of dry days allowed most of the harvest to be tidied up in a 10 day period which was much required. Yields have held up fairly well, but the main issue of the season has been that of quality in spring barley caused mainly by late secondary growth which led to some high skinnings and lower germinations than required. The last of winter oilseed rape has been sown in the last few days which is slower to get going as the weather cools which has coincided with some flea beetle activity. More advanced crops are growing away rapidly and volunteer cereals in the non-ploughed fields are getting controlled. Winter wheat drilling has begun on some earlier land but the main window for winter cereal drilling is just approaching.

FIFE

A warm and breezy 10 days has allowed harvest to accelerate towards an end with only around 15% of spring barley left to cut and spring beans following close behind (some have already been cut). Yields and quality vary, those crops on light sandy ground have fared badly due to drought, with reports of lower yields and higher screening and skinning levels reported. Nitrogen levels in malting barley from poorer yielding fields is higher than optimum but accommodation for this is being made by some merchants. Winter oilseed rape crops for harvest 2024 have established well, with most up and showing 3 true leaves or more. Some evidence of slug activity and flea beetle, but most crops have grown past the flea beetle damaging stage. After last night's heavy downpours thoughts are turning to establishing winter barley and winter wheats (some early winter barleys are already at 2 leaf) hopefully a band of more settled weather will return to allow good establishment of winter cereals and the harvest of potato crops.

STIRLINGSHIRE

Harvest is well through with the recent good weather, yields seem reasonable and most straw is now baled and being moved off the fields. There are a few late crops of oats and barley still to finish off. Winter oilseed rape is getting well established. A few crops have had a couple of sprays for flea beetle. The earliest crops are at the 4 true leaf stage but are clean. Ploughing is underway in earnest with the good weather as soon as the fields have been cleared. Sowing is well underway for barleys and wheats, much in the last week. The earliest winter barley is now braiding and at 1st leaf.

LOTHIANS

Respite from the showery conditions a fortnight ago and temperatures rising into the mid 20's over a number of consecutive days has enabled combines to work through remaining acreages relatively unhindered. Some crops of beans are cut and pockets of spring barley, particularly on the more fertile sites, are still to cut as farmers wait for grain moisture to drop. Wheat yields have been much more consistent than seen in spring barley and whilst below last year's yields, results have surprised some, albeit generally protein content is below expectation. Specific weights are typically in the 74-76kg/hl range. Skinning levels in spring barley are the major concern with samples most commonly between 6-10% but rising to as high as 20%. Yields are well down on last year with the later-sown, lighter-soil sites suffering the most. First vining peas are being taken off and potato lifting has started. Earliest wheats on min-tilled ground have been established and will emerge quickly in these warm conditions. Aphids have been seen already in those crops already emerged and treatment thresholds will need monitoring carefully over the next 6 weeks.

BORDERS

There has been 6mm of rain in the last 2 weeks, with some hot days making for a good harvest period. Harvest is drawing to a close, however there is still spring barley and spring oats to be harvested. Reports from growers are of pleasing winter wheat yields. Some wheat is already back in the ground. Slug pressure appears minimal, probably the result of the dry spell. Quality on spring barley, remains an issue, with reports of high screenings, skinning and high nitrogen, resulting in some loads being rejected. Reports this year are of yields below average. For those fields yet to be harvested, some lodging has occurred, making harvest difficult. Oilseed rape is back in the ground, with some crops now at 2 leaf stage. There are reports of some minor flea beetle damage and some slug damage, however this appears minimal. Potato lifting has commenced.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

We have had a recent good spell of weather which has allowed for the last of the spring barley to get harvested and straw to be baled. Winter barley drilling has commenced in almost ideal conditions. Forage crops are looking excellent although there are some crops with flea beetle damage but nothing significant. Grass continues to grow and there will still be some silage to make as farmers look to tidy up fields.

STRANRAER

The weather has been fantastic the last couple of weekends and has really helped with getting the last of the harvest done and fields prepared for autumn sowing. Reflecting on winter wheat crops there have been some disappointing results from particular varieties and a few varieties which have performed very well and will no doubt increase in acreage next year. Lodging has been an issue and applications of regulators will need to be looked at closely for next year. Winter oats have probably been the most successful crops this year with crops standing well after double regulation and have been easily harvested with good grain and higher quality straw in comparison to the winter barleys and winter wheats. Maize crops are looking very good but will hinge on weather for harvest. Fodderbeet crops also looking well and expected to yield well. The last 2 weeks has also seen a lot of silage made but overall, so far there has been very mixed quality when analysed from the pit.