

25 April 2024

General Comments

Oilseed rape is flowering now and light leaf spot levels low. Winter barley crops are commonly just past T1 and rhynchosporium is the main issue being reported. Winter wheats are variable with some now at leaf 3 fully emerged and ready for T1 sprays and some further back and still at the very early stages of stem extension. Internodes tend to be short this year, so crops are often sitting closer to the ground. Septoria is present but usually restricted to older dying leaves, and still no reports of yellow rust. Mildew in oats is increasing.

Regional Comments

ORKNEY

It feels like it has rained most days since the harvest stopped last year and as a result, very little spring barley has so far been sown. Much of the land has yet to be ploughed and it needs a string of good dry days with wind before significant progress will be made. Undoubtedly, some land will only be sown in May which makes a concerning prospect given how early the weather breaks in the Autumn. We hope the weather improves soon and a proper summer lies ahead to allow everything to catch up.

CAITHNESS

We have been very lucky in the north with quite a lot of spring crop in the ground in pretty good conditions. In fact, the early sown is now through the ground these past couple of days after a short spell of better temperatures. That said there is still plenty of seed still in the bag. Some cattle are appearing out, but grass is still in fairly short supply. Straw at the most recent local sale was in high demand while there was no interest in the hay offered for sale.

INVERNESS

In Inverness the weather has finally dried up and started warming up. Spring sowing is progressing at pace. However, ground conditions are still not ideal with the saturated ground needing a lot of drying. Winter wheat and barley are looking good with the improved weather and now in stem elongation stages and clean. The early sown spring barley is now at GS 12. Grass in the area is also growing with top dress now going on.

ABERDEENSHIRE

It seems a tale of two halves so far this spring when speaking to farmers about spring crops, as some have started sowing, and got on surprising well given the conditions, and there are others who have barely started, or keep getting stuck when they try to get on the land. Patience has gone out the window a long time ago now, and farmers are juggling jobs to just try and keep up with volume of work to be done, whether it be spraying, fert spreading, ploughing, or sowing at present. I've even heard drill machines working all night during this current wee dry spell (at time of writing). Rhyncho and septoria can be found quite easily in a lot of winter crops, due to the disease pressure caused by the wet weather, but T1 sprays have been going onto winter barley and some winter wheats. Oilseed rape has finally started to flower, and flowering sprays will not be far away. Grass growth is still quite slow, due to the cold wet spring and purple leaves can be seen in many fields suggesting mild phosphate deficiency due to the cold wet conditions, which is also restricting turnout of stock.

BANFF & BUCHAN

As ever the weather continues to dictate the arable farmers work in the area. Sowing progress is a very mixed bag and sporadic at best – some areas are finished or almost there with barley peeping through, some have made a start whereas others have been left to look forlornly at wet, sodden fields, waiting ever more impatiently for the sun to shine. While mainly arable farmers are chomping at the bit, many with stock have still muck to spread and fields to plough. Winter crops continue to look well despite the lack of sun and heat, with oilseed rape crops starting to flower and winter wheat and barley receiving fungicides and growth regulators, with some farmers also taking the chance to tidy up any weeds. While there is some disease in wheats at low levels, Rhynchosporium has crept into the winter barleys. Elsewhere, the late spring is starting to cause concern for potato growers however grass is now starting to grow, and more stock are being turned out.

ANGUS

The rain has stopped for a while at least and planting of everything is happening with the numbers of tractors and drivers often being the limiting factor. Spring barley drilling is taking place but often in less than ideal conditions even though we are in the later part of April. Drills are coming across soft spots and drilling around wet areas and whilst it is dry above it is often quite wet and cold soil below the crust. Winter oilseed rape is coming into flower, winter barley is around GS 31 and ready for T1 fungicides and growth regulation but rynchosporium can be seen in many crops. Winter wheat seems a bit slower and is not quite at the T1 timing. Cold weather has not been ideal for getting on herbicides to control grass weeds in the many fields which did not receive autumn herbicides with some crops having had a bit of a fright.

PERTHSHIRE

A flurry of activity is taking place at present with drills working long hours to get spring crops sown in what is now a late season. Winter oilseed rape crops are now beginning to flower and generally look well. Winter barley crops also tend to look well but some of the later sown fields have areas washed or flooded out. Winter wheat crops also tend to look well but there is significantly less wheat in the ground than was planned with many ex-potato fields now being sown in spring barley instead.

FIFE

Field work has kicked off in earnest over the last few days! Late sown beans and spring barleys are being sown, with barley seed rates being increased 10 – 20% in some places. Machinery are finding wet patches to get stuck in where no wet patches have existed before! Winter barley T1 fungicides have mostly been applied, and winter wheat T1s for all but late sown fields will be applied towards the start of next week. WOSR fields are mostly at early flowering/yellow bud, but they tend to be patchy with areas well behind the main body of crop. A good, settled spell of weather will allow seedbeds to improve and spring crops to be sown.

STIRLINGSHIRE

Finally, a dry spell! It's all systems go across the region as everything needs done at once! Tillage, sowing, fertiliser, spraying are all taking place particularly on the lighter ground. The heavier carse soils are still wet but it has been just dry enough to top dress fertiliser on the winter crops and some have had fungicide sprays. All winter cereals where they established okay are putting on growth as although it has been wet it has been warm. For growth stages WB are between 31 and 37 GS and WW is GS 28-31. Winter wheats and barley are at stem elongation. A little disease is appearing with *Septoria tritici* in wheat and some *Rhynchosporium* in barley which was expected. The Oilseed Rape is flowering and only a few pollen beetles per plant, there are some good example crops of OSR in the region. Grassland is beginning to green up, but growth has been slow. The main turn out of cattle still to occur as the heavier soils are still wet and there is not as much bulk of spring grass yet. A few farms have turned out smaller mobs of cattle.

LOTHIANS

Finally, a period of more settled weather is establishing itself as April closes out. The first two weeks of the month saw upward of 80mm of rain for many, extending the frustration and angst for arable and livestock farmers alike. The more recent drier conditions have at last allowed field travel and good drilling progress has been made. Sub-surface compaction may yet present itself in crops later in the season given that most fields we're at or near field capacity only until recently. Winter oats, winter barley and the early sown winter wheats look well but the contrast is stark when compared to later sown wheat crops on colder soils that are only just starting to grow away. Soil temperatures are warming slowly, circa 8 degrees currently (Easter Howgate).

The more developed wheats are typically GS 31 and receiving T1 programmes although there will be crops that won't receive their T1 until we're into May. Disease pressure is generally low in cereals and spring germinating broadleaved weeds seem particularly slow to emerge this year, extending herbicide programmes beyond the normal windows. Propagated veg is finally being delivered for planting out and potato land prepared ahead of planting.

BORDERS

A more settled spell of weather has allowed for significant progress to be made on spring barley drilling. It is estimated that ~50% has been drilled. Heavy soils are still wet underneath with cultivation creating wheeling's and a pan in parts of some fields.

Many growers have increased seed rates where possible and are making plans to reduce total nitrogen applications as a way of mitigating against a shorter growing season. Some Pre emergence herbicides will be applied this week if spray conditions allow. Winter wheat is predominantly at GS 30 – 31, with the most forward crops approaching T1 timing (Leaf 3 fully emerged). There is plenty of septoria on lower dying leaves, however new growth is allowing crops to grow away from this. Some growers are considering strategies to combine an herbicide and growth regulator with the T1 fungicide where fields have previously been too wet to travel. Winter barley is ranging from GS31–32. Some forward crops have already received T1 applications, with others ready when a spray window opens, or ground conditions allow. Winter oilseed rape is at mid flowering. Some light leaf spot can be found. Pollen beetle is present but at low numbers.

LANARKSHIRE

After what has been one of the wettest springs on record, with one local farmer with a rain gauge highlighting we have had 46 dry days since September, Lanarkshire is seeing some desperately needed warmer, drier days. Ploughs are finally on, and seeding is well underway across the district for those lucky enough to have ground dry enough to travel on. There are still many fields that are too wet to work or carry stock currently. However, dairy and beef cattle are beginning to make their way out to spring grazing and lambs are skipping around the fields. There are a couple of farms cutting paddocks to stop the grass growth booting to an unmanageable level. There are farms beginning to run out of forage and straw, with a rippling worry of the oncoming growing season leading to a shortage of straw as some winter crops have failed to establish and spring crops are late in the ground. Crops are likely to be shorter with less straw for harvest.

AYRSHIRE

Dare I say it, spring might actually be here and better late than never! Recent wet weather has been a real issue for many across the country, including here in the southwest, however the last few dry days have provided a much-needed window for farmers to get on with some ploughing, to spread dung and slurry and for the dairy farmers, to get cows out. Because of the rain and poor ground conditions a lot of spring crop is still to go in, but better not in than washed out. Some winter barley in the area has been recorded at GS23 and is still tillering, looking surprising healthy despite the challenges with the growing conditions. Some potential instances of copper and sulphur deficiencies, though it is not clear to what extent poor growth rates could just be down to poor growing conditions.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Finally, some dry weather has allowed some progress with spring cropping. A good 75% of crops should be planted by the end of this week. Winter barley crops are generally looking ok and around GS31–33. The last of the T1 applications are being applied to the later drilled fields and wetter fields that couldn't travel. Crops are reasonably clean with some rhynchosporium present. Winter wheat T1 applications will start being applied this week, again the crops are looking reasonably well with some septoria present. Grass growth has been very good in the region. Most dairy 1st cut fertiliser applications have been made although a week or so late due to the wet weather.