

16 March 2023

General Comments

There has been good progress with field work until snow and or heavy rain early this week called a halt. The main priority has been getting fertilisers on to winter crops with winter oilseed rape and winter barley being the priorities but some wheats also getting fed. There are still only a very few spring barley crops in the ground, but soils are still very cold (5°C or lower at trowel depth) so seed already in the ground will be very slow moving. Disease levels in crops vary but are still somewhat higher now than for a few years so TO fungicides will be given a higher priority.

Regional Comments

CAITHNESS

After a very productive end to February spring work, progress has been halted with a white start to March in the area. It will invariably lead to a rush when the snow disappears with time marching on, but it is likely ground will be wet when the thaw eventually comes. Fodder continues to be in good supply both on farm and plentiful lots for sale even with the cold snap.

MORAY

As winter draws to a close it does so with a flurry of activity, deep snow in the east of the county, hailstorms and freezing temperatures have left their mark meaning little or no growth for winter cereals over the past fortnight. Winter oilseed rape does seem to have stretched a little bit standing that wee bit taller in the field. The melting snow coupled with about 30mm of rain in 48 hrs at the weekend has put pay to any thoughts of early sowing of spring cereals. Wet and cold soils will mean that sowing is unlikely to start for another week or ten days yet.

ABERDEENSHIRE

The view from Aberdeenshire (at time of writing) is white with snow, following last week's blast from the north, interspersed with sunshine and then heavy rain yesterday (Monday 13th). This has slowed everyone's plans of an early start to spring this year (so far!), but with soils generally being quite dry, the moisture will be of benefit later on. The cold frosty nights will also be helping to break down the soil (where ploughing has been done) helping to prepare the ground for spring sowings, but frost heave is having an effect in some places on exposed winter crops.

Septoria can be found on wheat leaves and Rhynchosporium can be seen in winter barley, so early sprays maybe needed to help clean up crops when conditions improve. Mobile seed dressers are out and about getting home saved seed ready for sowing.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The last 10 days have seen little, or no groundwork achieved, with last week's snow and ice giving way to heavy rain and only slightly higher temperatures. Crops are dirty this spring and agronomists don't have to walk far to find disease, with much higher levels than normal seen with Rhynchosporium and mildew in winter barleys, light leaf spot in oilseed rape and mildew and Septoria in winter wheats, though thankfully no sign yet of the yellow rust seen in other areas. The relative inaction of the past fortnight has meant that crops are also looking even yellower and hungrier than before, with a large proportion still to receive their dose of nitrogen however current ground conditions dictate that spreaders and sprayers will be staying in the shed for a good few days yet. Spring seed and fertiliser continues to be delivered with every grower seemingly feeling that they have bought their fertiliser at the wrong time this year. In relative terms prices of inputs are still high, with pesticides also expected to be more expensive this year although grain prices also seem to be holding up, meaning that 2023 should still see decent margins made- weather permitting. Livestock farmers also seem to be fairly optimistic about the year ahead- relieved to no longer be paying anywhere near the £300 per ton seen for barley and wheat a year ago, with beef and pig producers now having their turn of receiving record prices for their products.

ANGUS

A prolonged cold spell has prevented spring sowing from advancing as the soil is too cold. However, this delay in establishment has allowed for the last of the ploughing to be completed, putting many in a good position for when the weather starts to warm. Many in Angus were able to apply the first nitrogens to winter oilseed rape due to good ground conditions. There have been reports of yellow rust to the south in Fife and the Lothians, however, we are yet to find any in Angus, potentially eroding the need for a TO.

PERTSHIRE

The cooler weather of the last few weeks has slowed growth of crops and enthusiasm for early drilling. Ground conditions have been favourable allowing any compound fertiliser or early nitrogen applications required to be applied largely without leaving a mark. Disease can still be found in many crops, and some will think about applying TO sprays in the near future. Ploughing for spring crops is all but complete and soil conditions look good for drilling on a sunny day, but the soil is still cold, and most are hanging off for now.

FIFE

A dry start to March had some fields of spring barley sown, this was closely followed by a change in the weather to hard frosts followed by a couple of days with a thin covering of snow. Winter crops have come through the winter looking well with relatively low disease pressure (though odd report of yellow rust in the east of Fife). Winter barleys are approaching GS30, Craft seems to

have net blotch where varieties such as Tower have low levels of mildew and the odd spot of *Rhynchosporium* starting to show. Winter wheats are around GS 25 and are quite clean, with only the odd spot of *Septoria* showing on oldest leaves. Winter oilseed rape growing well where pigeons have left it alone. Furthest on is starting to develop side shoots. Light leaf spot applications will be applied when conditions permit once this wet weather front has gone.

STIRLINGSHIRE

Stirlingshire's combinable crops overall are quite clean but in need of some nitrogen. The winter wheat is at GS 12 with two leaves unfolded, crops are looking mostly clean of disease and there is little pest damage of these crops. *Septoria* is present in the odd crop, but in the lower leaves. In general, it has been quite dry till now and crops have coped fine over the winter with leaves fairly green. Though with the drop in temperature over the last week some purpling in the side and undersides of newer leaves has occurred. This is maybe due to a temporary phosphorus deficiency with the temperature drop. Some nitrogen fertiliser has been applied in the last few weeks. The WB crop is mixed across the region, some crops on lighter ground are the smallest and most yellow with grassweeds also an issue. The better-looking crops are in the heavier soils and these crops here are substantially thicker, taller despite being sown at same time. The average GS is 22 with main shoot and 2 tillers. The winter barley, like the winter wheat crops, are also in need of a nitrogen boost. Winter oilseed rape is now starting to come. The growth stage is 3.1 with flower buds present but enclosed by leaves. The leaf area is bulking up; however, some crops have been hit quite hard by pests especially pigeons and geese. There is little disease present due to the recent dry weather.

LOTHIANS

Rain returned as we approached the middle of the month with most areas seeing between 30 and 40mm falling between the 12th and 14th March and followed on from what had been a relatively dry first 10 days of the month. Fields invariably have a cold and wet 'feel' to them still, with reports that soil temperatures have lowered again after their earlier rise. There is little prospect therefore of spring herbicide applications until temperatures warm again. Winter cereals are slowly advancing to GS 30. Live yellow rust found a fortnight ago in Skyscraper has seemingly succumbed to the frost without fungicide treatment, albeit leaving the crop susceptible to re-infection; a TO may yet be required. Susceptibility to strains of the disease at the young plant stage is often common in varieties which then go on to develop resistance after early stem extension and Skyscraper is one such variety with an adult plant resistance score of 7. Winter barley is cleaner than comparative reports with little *Rhynchosporium* or net blotch evidenced. Oilseed rape crops are moving into stem extension phase with the most forward crops at flower bud visible. As with most fieldwork tasks, drilling spring crops looks to be a game of patience at the moment.

BORDERS

After a chilly couple of weeks, soil temperatures have taken a step back from 7°C two weeks ago to 5°C this week. With heavy showers and 23mm of rain, the fields are holding up well as the ground was so dry. Little progress in crops can be seen. Disease pressures remain low on most crops. Light leaf spot present on lower leaves on oilseed rape, *Septoria* present on older wheat

leaves and Rhynchosporium and dead mildew can be found in winter barley fields with frost helping keep it inactive. For those who are looking to apply TO on winter wheat and winter barley, the ground conditions shouldn't cause issues travelling in fields. Hoping for some warmer weather to get the crops moving ago.

LANARKSHIRE

Spells of drier, colder weather have let early fertiliser application get underway, although conditions are sticky in places. Some tramlines are showing wheelings. Ploughing has been going ahead, but drilling is yet to start. Grassland has been receiving slurry as ground conditions have improved. Things are still cold enough for any early grass growth to be apparent.

AYRSHIRE

After a promising start to the month with some good drying weather, the last week has put ground conditions back to where they were in February, wet. Temperatures have also dropped over the last couple of days meaning there has been snow. It will take a bit of dry weather to get ground conditions back to where they were to continue with cultivations, dung and slurry applications.

STRANRAER

The hard frosts, snow and rain of the last week has slowed progress for spring work and grass growth. Ground conditions are now variable and soil temperatures are below optimum for this time of year, stalling fertiliser applications. Winter crops which received fertiliser a couple of weeks ago appear to be coping okay but recent weather looks to be delaying the arrival of spring in the southwest.