

25 October 2023

General Comments

The effects of Storm Babet are very regional with the very far north (Orkney and Shetland), the the south and west being less affected and the Forfar area which is a key arable area was particularly badly hit. This is almost the opposite of the heavy rain and flooding damage at the end of the first week of October, where the west coast took the brunt.

There was hasty progress with the potato harvest in anticipation of Storm Babet arriving so a good proportion is in, although some fields still remain to be harvested and may be written off now. The main worry will be the areas of winter crop already drilled and how well it has survived, and in wetter areas fields of winter cereals still to go in may not now get drilled.

Regional Comments

INVERNESS

The exceptionally wet weather of storm Babet took its toll on the Inverness area like the rest of the north and east. On the whole oilseed rape and winter barley have fared ok. Being well established, they stood up to water logging and the heavy downpours. Winter Wheat has not fared as well. Many crops were still at the 2 or 3 leaf stage and areas have been washed out, or were recently sown and will be capped in places. Other fields planned for wheat have been abandoned and will be spring barley. Time will tell how some of these crops recover. Potato lifting was not completed before the heavy rains of the weekend, a rough estimate of the area remaining to be lifted would be 20% of the crop in the area. The water logged ground will make it challenging to lift the remaining area. Parts of the river Spey has burst its banks and repair work will be necessary. Since it is predominantly grass, with a small area of spring cropping it will not effect cropping right now but there is still an area underwater.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The Buchan area thankfully missed the worst of Storm Babet and while high winds and very heavy rain led to some power cuts, flooded roads and other damage to infrastructure, things quickly returned to normal. Ground conditions now however are very wet and although almost all grain harvesting has been complete for sometime in our area, any remaining straw to be baled will now have to remain in the bout until spring or be chopped and incorporated. Most oilseed rapes and winter cereal cereals were established into good warm, seed beds and had been looking well. Winter oilseed rapes will still need to get their Light Leaf Spot sprays- however when is the question, with ground conditions now a major factor. Winter wheat is, as always remarkably hardy and seems to have come through the heavy rains okay, unfortunately the same can't be said for some winter barley crops with any lower lying or compacted areas starting to turn yellow due to

the waterlogged conditions. As always, where crops are recently sown and there is very heavy rainfall, there are instances of soil erosion with some fields bearing scar-like trenches from run-off. With mostly seed potatoes grown locally and export markets seemingly calling earlier and earlier for potatoes, this has meant that most potatoes were lifted and safely stored before Storm Babet. Cattle are now mostly inside although sheep farmers are having to be careful with grazing to prevent poaching, something that is not easy to avoid with soils in their current condition.

PERTSHIRE

The effects of storm Babet ranged from being a wet day in more Southerly and Westerly parts of Perthshire getting gradually worse the further North and East you travel. Significant areas of flooding has been seen on low lying areas and some winter crops have been flooded out. Potatoes had mostly been harvested from the usual flood prone areas but there are still fields of potatoes to be harvested and continual showery weather since the storm plus short days means that these fields are not drying out quickly and farmers are struggling to harvest having to drive around wet patches or just wait in the hope that a drier spell will appear. Recently sown winter cereals are sitting wet, often with no autumn herbicide applied and travel would be difficult. Many have just decided to put the drill and put the sprayed away for the winter now, and will change cropping plans to include more spring cropping although some are still hopeful to get more wheat sown this autumn.

FORFAR

Storm Babet focussed its attention on Angus with reports of up to 150mm of rainfall over 48 hours falling in some places. However, some of the lower lying areas who didn't necessarily receive that amount of rainfall still flooded badly when the water moved down from the hills. The storm was well warned of in advance, and farmers worked long hours to try and harvest as many potatoes and vegetables from flood prone land but some of that land was still recovering from the previous 100mm event a fortnight prior and therefore was difficult to travel. The flooding has been significant, and most people are saying they have never seen water levels as high in any previous flooding events. The result has been that some potato and vegetable crops have been lost, some recently sown winter crops will likely rot out and some more established crops which have sat under water for significant periods will also rot out. It is also likely that many fields which had been destined to be sown in an autumn crop will now be left for spring cropping. In the worst affected areas then there are fields which have lost significant amounts of soil, particularly in undulating fields where the water flows into gully's, farm tracks and public roads have been washed out and also lower lying areas have seen significant amounts of stone and soil deposition. There will be a lot of work to be carried out repairing tracks, roads, steadings, drains, clearing debris and rectifying washed out areas.

FIFE

Rain every couple of days is not allowing fields to dry out so wheat seeding has virtually stopped. Potato lifting is continuing between showers and is drawing to a close. Fields that have been sown in wheat post potatoes are suffering a fair bit of surface runoff, earlier sown wheat and winter barleys seemed to establish well and are at about 2 leaf but have washed out and flooded areas in many fields. Later sown wheats have not had pre-emergence herbicides applied in many cases and some later sown winter barleys, the hope is for a dry spell to get the herbicide onto the winter barley for grass weed control. Winter oilseed rape has established well and has up to 8 big leaves but are showing signs of water logging with purple and yellowing leaves.

LOTHIANS

With the epi-centre of storm Babet having tracked to the north of the Lothians, very heavy rainfall episodes have been less widespread, more localised, events. The east coast appears to have particularly affected by prolonged rainfall with 100–150mm not uncommon (October to-date.) Some areas, less affected, have been able to resume field operations this week, for example, spraying, whilst for others the legacy of waterlogged ground continues to impact field operations. Residual herbicide efficacy will also be brought into question in these highest rainfall areas. Livestock currently on ground more susceptible to poaching will be yarded earlier than had been planned with the knock-on impacts on conserved forage and bedding stock use.

STIRLING

Little has changed in the area following storm Babet. Stirling avoided the worst of the weather although both the Forth and Teith rose significantly in places, it fell quite quickly. This has left some of the lower flatter fields with some pools of water both in established and newly sown winter crops. Damage won't be significant, just localised in various fields. There are one or two pockets of cereals still to harvest, but they were in that state prior to the storm. They will be written off as the crops are flat. A few fields of beans remain, they will wait for a frost. The crops generally are looking well both cereals and oilseed rape.

BORDERS

There has been 83mm of rain in just over 2 weeks, causing disruption to those drilling cereals, particularly on fields where potatoes have been lifted, or where fields were cultivated awaiting drilling. Most winter wheat has been drilled and is ranging from germination to beginning of tillering. Winter barley is ranging from 3 leaves unfolded to beginning of tillering. Recent colder conditions have reduced slug pressure, however they remain a threat on winter cereals. Oilseed rape crops are ranging from 2 leaf to 7 leaves. Many growers are preparing to spray for light leaf spot/phoma and to tidy up volunteer cereals.

AYRSHIRE

Fortunately, the weather in Ayrshire hasn't been significantly impacted by Storm Babet, meaning that weather conditions have been fairly settled over the last week. People have been able to carry on with cultivations and winter crops have not been impacted. Some dryer days allowed those caught out with straw harvest to get it baled and carted in to shed.