

19 August 2021

General comments

Harvest is always a pressured time, but this year all crops are coming ready together so the usual sequences are going out the window. Heavy rain has been interspersed with some good drying days. As ever yields over the country vary – the winter barley grain and straw yields have been above average in some area and 'ok' but not spectacular in others. A very small start in spring barley harvesting confirms that yields are likely to be variable – that much will come as no surprise just from looking at crops. That mainly related to earlier stresses rather than the late ingress of ramularia which is now pretty common in crops. New oilseed rape crop is going into good conditions and coming through rapidly. The first in came through in five days. Heavy showers in some areas obviously hinder harvest progress but there is also a bit of lodging in spring barley crops where it has been particularly heavy.

Regional comments

Orkney

The main barley crop is 2–3 weeks away from being ripe enough for combining. There will be crops harvested earlier, such as the ancient bere variety for the food and drink industry and some conventional barley varieties cut for crimping. The biggest threat to barley at this time of year comes from greylag geese. They have begun feeding on some crops already, and their numbers are such that they can decimate a field overnight. Farmers remain extremely vigilant to identify when they land near the edges of barley fields so swift and effective action can be taken. Scarecrows and gas guns alone are of limited benefit as they are effective for only short periods of time. Although there has been some much-needed rainfall over the last week, grazing is tight on many farms which may see store cattle being sold earlier than normal.

Caithness

Winter barley harvest has been completed in fairly good conditions. Yields of grain and straw have exceeded expectations. Ploughing for winter crop has also commenced in very dry conditions. Some spring barley has now been sprayed off. Spring crop in general appears to have caught up with 2020 timings now after a very difficult start to life in the spring. The limited swedes grown in the area have really benefited from the rain in the period, albeit limited rainfall compared to other areas in the country.

Moray

Intermittent rain showers are slowing progress of the spring barley harvest which began last week with some good looking, full headed crops around, alongside some thinner patchy looking crops. Winter wheat crops are also not too far away from being ready to cut but would perhaps need a couple of weeks yet to harden off. Winter barley harvest yields on the whole, seem to be about average (7.5t/Ha), nothing special but okay with reasonable bushel weights and plenty of straw. Oilseed rape harvest is also complete, and indications are of reasonable yields but again no records will be broken this year. Next season's oilseed rape crops are going into the ground in good conditions.

Aberdeenshire

Winter barley crops have now been harvested, so far reported yields have been average. The earliest of winter oilseed rape has been harvested, however a large proportion of crops are still to be harvested. Sowing of winter oilseed seed rape crops has been underway over the past week, first yield reports have been good. Harvest is expected to begin in the earliest of spring barley crops over the next few days.

Banff & Buchan

With harvest well underway, the weather now has an autumnal feel to it with sunny days punctuated by showers – some of which have been very heavy. Winter barleys are almost finished – yields of grain and straw have been good with the sunshine of the early summer resulting in good bushel weights. Oilseed rapes are now being combined with yields average at best. Winter wheats and spring barley are ripening fast and are not far off with some crops being sprayed off although spring oat crops are still a bit away. Next years oilseed rapes are now being sown into warm, moist seedbeds– perfect for the crops to get up and away to keep out of trouble from the double threat of slugs and flea beetle. Most crops will receive a pre-emergence which will be followed by a graminicide once soils cool down in some crops– providing an opportunity to tackle some of the unwanted grassweeds that are beginning to appear on north east farms as well as barley volunteers. Good establishment has now become even more important given the price increase seen in seedbed fertiliser. New crop grain prices seem to be rising again with straw prices also starting the season strongly. Along with the change in the weather and shortening days, potatoes are being flailed and sprayed off and feeding lambs are starting to appear in fields – sure signs that we are entering autumn.

Kincardineshire

A mixed spell of weather over the past few weeks has seen harvest progress slowly. Winter barley is now finished, and yields seem to be around average or just above. Winter oilseed rape is just being started and so far, yields are reported to be average. Spring barley harvest is just starting in the earlier areas. Winter wheat is also not far from being ready and will start this week or next. Oilseed rape is being sown in good conditions. Let's hope we have a few weeks of good weather to allow harvest to progress.

Angus

Heavy rain last week has opened up into more stable weather this week. All of the winter barley has been cut and a start has been made into the earliest spring barley crops. Oilseed rape is more of a mixed bag, with some still in the field. New season rape is being sown, and with the fairer weather it is expected that there will be a lot sown this week. Wheat is fairly mixed, with some nearly ready and other crops still awaiting a pre harvest desiccant.

Perthshire

Harvest is beginning to pick up pace now winter barley is finished, winter oats and winter oilseed rape well through and early crops of spring barley and oats and winter wheat now coming under the knife in good

conditions. A good proportion of new crop winter oilseed rape has now been established which has emerged within few days. Crops should be monitored closely for flea beetle and slugs.

Fife

Fife crops are rapidly coming to harvest. Winter barleys are all cut and yields have been above average to good, straw yields also good. Oilseed rape harvest has started with the earliest fields having been cut last week, later fields are due to be harvested towards the end of this week. Winter wheats and spring barleys look like they will be ready together, some early fields of spring barley have been harvested over the last two days, no reports on yield have been made so far but straw looks a little thin. Hopefully a good dry spell of weather will allow everything to be cut and under cover without many delays.

Lothians

Harvest is progressing well in the Lothians with all winter barleys harvested and oil seed rape drilling making steady progress with the favorable conditions. Forward spring barley and wheat crops have been harvested in areas, but in general, the bulk of both are still to be harvested with straw being baled and cleared in good order in general. It is a similar story with oil seed rape crops, with some forward crops harvested but the majority still to be harvested.

Borders

29mm of rain so far for August, consisting of some heavy localised showers last week has meant that harvest has been a bit stop start. Most oilseed rape crops are in the shed. There have been mixed reports so far on yields, with some crops checked by frosts in spring and others not. Oilseed rape drilling continues, with friable soil providing good seed/soil contact, paving the way for pre-emergence herbicide applications. Spring barley harvest is well underway with early reports are of yields at 8tonne/ha and excellent straw yields, however it's still too early to get the full assessment. Some early drilled winter wheat crops have been cut, with the majority still ripening (GS91), with good progress expected to be made from next week. There has been mixed use of pre harvest desiccant. Some spraying whole crops, others headlands and some using none at all (depending on evenness of field).

Stirling

Harvest in Stirlingshire is going well with WB and WOSR now finished. WO have also been started and WW is not far away now with earlier varieties ready for the combine. The further west there are areas with a lot of lodged crops primarily due to the stormy weather in the last few weeks but coupled with some overlaps of fertiliser. On some WW varieties small, shrivelled grains have been reported and there is fusarium present. SB crops looking good with the first of these harvested this week, the SO are also looking fine. Drilling has already begun in the harvested OSR ground and WB has been sown in ideal conditions and is establishing well. Currently, crops are at GS12 with 2 leaves unfolded. There is little pest damage and no disease present. Hopefully, the weather window will hold as the soil conditions are good. Barns are filling up with good average yields reported for grain and straw.

Lanarkshire

With the extended dry spell coming to an end with some biblical downpours, it is good to see so much of the remaining crops still standing. Other than for whole crop, little of the winter wheat or spring barley has been harvested, although the occasional combine can be seen making a start in crops that have been sprayed off. A fairly settled forecast for the next couple of weeks is encouraging many to hold off until moisture content is lower. The return of some rain has helped grass growth. This has been welcomed by grazers and silage makers alike, many of whom are getting their second cut and some now at their third.

Ayrshire

The rain arrived in Ayrshire over the past fortnight allowing farmers, particularly those with sandy/shallow soils, to breath a short sigh of relief. The rain has given the grass a real boost with silage aftermaths growing well and some second cut silages cut over the past day looking good. Both the winter and spring crops are ready for combining, with those that are more exposed having had some damage from the heavy rain last week. Now the weather has broken combining is sporadic, with little bits done as and when the conditions allow.

Dumfries & Galloway

The weather over the past couple of weeks has been wet and unsettled. We have experienced some heavy showers which has resulted in some flat patches in the spring barley crops. Once the weather dries up the combines will be out to get started on the spring barley harvest as most crops are about ready. Winter barley harvest is all finished and yield reports have been pretty good with yields being over the 3t/ac with plenty straw. Grass has been growing very well at the moment and 3rd cut yields are looking promising, which is much needed after the lighter 1st and 2nd cuts.

Stranraer

Winter Barley harvest has gone very well across the South West, crops have in general been over 3t/acre and one verified at over 4t/acre. Straw yields are also very pleasing with harvest and baling made easy with the weather. However, the rain has finally arrived. It varies locally as to how much has fallen but it is a relief to see the grass turning green again and growth kicking in. Winter Wheat harvests will be about to start but look like they will be bit more hard work in between the showers. The winter wheats have always looked like the crop which could yield the highest so will be interesting to see if these meet expectations. Forage crops in general look to be growing well and the fodder beet crops suffering from drought stress have made a miraculous recovery. Livestock demand for grass is still exceeding supply, at the moment in most areas, but there has been a flush of growth in the last week so optimism on silage crops and getting lambs finished is improving. Some farmers rotationally grazing are currently sitting 20% behind on last year's growth with 50% of our annual rainfall to come so utilisation of grass may become a bigger issue than lack of grass.