

11 November 2021

General comments

COP26 is in its final days as we put this Crop Protection Report together. In the addition to main policy and intergovernmental discussions, there have been thousands of associated side events. The pressing urgency is daunting but there are hopeful signs, including the 100 plus countries that have signed up to cut methane emissions in agriculture by 30%. Agriculture is increasingly being seen as having a key part to play in the solutions – in our own sector we know that about 15–20% of our production is at risk from pests, weeds and disease which equates to almost a million tonnes of yield annually in Scotland at risk if we do not actively manage crop protection.

There is no doubt that policy will drive or incentivise us towards more integrated crop protection practices, but this has always been a core theme for us in the Crop Protection Report, picking up on the key interventions that will reduce the risks of pests, weeds and diseases such as more diverse rotations and more resistant varieties. The sustainable and targeted use of Plant Protection Products is an integral part of IPM and reacting to monitoring and surveillance information is fundamental to decision making on the need, rate, timing and type of PPP required. The intelligence gathered from the local comments in the report and the adopt-a-crop monitoring of our key crop types help to give you a wider view of the risks you identify from walking your own crops. We will continue to provide independent evidence on the most effective PPPs and how they integrate them into sustainable production systems.

This is our last issue of the 2021 season as we try to align the 20 issues of the Crop Protection Report to the busy decision-making periods of the season. We hope the winter is kind to your crops and look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our joint FAS and AHDB winter workshops. More details in the news section towards the end of the report.

Regional comments

Caithness

It's really just been more of the same in the period, rain, rain and more rain! It has put a stop to some early ploughers for spring cropping but the winter crop in the ground hasn't been too badly affected so far. Most cattle are now in and whilst fodder and straw stocks seem to be generally good, most cattle will have been housed a fortnight earlier than last year.

Aberdeenshire

Heavy rainfall has continued across Aberdeenshire over the past few weeks. Overall, winter crops which were established early look well, particularly oilseed rape crops. Due to the wet weather, crops should continue to be closely monitored for signs of slug damage.

Banff & Buchan

The last few weeks have seen lots of rain, high winds and a definite chill in the air. Seed drills have been put away and the last of the potatoes are being lifted with any period of settled weather seeing a big push to get finished. Oilseed rapes still look farther on than normal but at least the colder weather has slowed them up with the last of the fungicides for Light Leaf Spot and insecticides being applied. Winter Barley has tillered well but again has slowed up for the winter.

Winter wheats have not had the best of starts with the period following establishment being far from ideal with some crops still to briar. Fertiliser is still a hot topic although more and more growers are biting the bullet and securing their supplies for next year with the rising future prices for next year's crop offering some comfort, although with prices of some grades more than twice that of last year, they are still hard to swallow. Back to the present and wheat, barley (both malting and feed) and oilseed rape prices are also continuing to rise.

Kincardineshire

After lengthy spell of unsettled weather, winter crops in general are faring quite well. Winter Oil Seed Rape, although varying in stages from area to area is looking good and should fare well during the winter months, the colder temps should keep light leaf spot at bay. Winter Barley & Winter Wheat have come through the wet spell remarkably well, most crops at 4-5 leaf stage. Tattie lifting is complete, grass growth in the area is still very active.

Angus

A wet couple of weeks in Angus has resulted in many growers putting their drills away for the season. This week saw the last few areas of potatoes being lifted, and these fields will likely miss the wheat rotation, instead being left for spring cropping. Established crops are quite far forward, particularly oilseed rape. Winter barleys are generally looking good, however there is noticeable amounts of mildew present in many crops, hopefully some frosts will clean this up. Some of the later sown wheat is still to emerge, but the seed has chitted in many cases and it won't be long until it appears. Grower attention is turning to winter planning, with particular attention to future fertiliser policy.

Perthshire

Mild weather has allowed crops to continue to grow and some early sown oilseed rape is a bit further on than is ideal for the time of year. Disease levels are building in all crops which will need to be monitored and a few mixed farmers have allowed sheep onto forward crops to hold them back a bit. Most people have drilled all they had planned to drill, mostly into good seedbeds and overall crops are going into the winter well established. The main talking point is that of fertiliser prices and if fertiliser has not been bought early then total nitrogen applications look set to be cut back

Fife

Crops have come through the heavy rain well with even the latest fields sown between showers having good looking seed beds. These latest fields have not had pre-em weed control applied yet but if the forecast stays fair this may be applied by the end of the week. Winter barley fields have yellow older leaves due to a combination of wet feet and some mildew, a frost or two would soon clean up the mildew. WOSR fields are looking very forward with little sign of disease and weed control seems to have worked well. Mostly potato harvest is complete with just a few small areas that were too wet getting tidied up this week. Carrot and sprout harvest seems to be moving at pace already with large tractor and trailers doing the haul to Kettle.

Lothians

The last few weeks in the Lothians have brought some mild and wet weather, but this hasn't caused too many issues as the majority of growers have completed their autumn sowing programmes. However, this wet weather has resulted in some challenging traveling conditions for sprayers meaning some autumn herbicides, insecticide and manganese applications to vulnerable crops such as winter barley being delayed. There are some growers still to sow wheat behind late harvested potato crops, but this is very much in the minority. Winter crops in general are in very good condition benefiting from the favorable sowing conditions, in particular, WOSR crops are in tremendous condition, but some very forward crops may be vulnerable to lodging if significant snow fall is to occur. If the mild

wet weather is to continue there is potential for increased disease and weed pressure but so far this hasn't been the case and disease and weed pressure is low with some yellow rust being present in crops.

Borders

With little rain over the past fortnight ground conditions have improved to allow sprayers out and the last of the winter wheat to be sown. Winter barley crops are tillering, and mildew is evident in many crops although levels are lower than two weeks ago. Early sown wheat crops are also at tillering. Light leaf spot sprays have been applied to oilseed rape crops in the last few days.

Stirling

We have now had a respite from the very wet weather. Despite that, all the winter crops are growing well having established before the weather changed. Their growth has slowed down (both crops and weeds) as it is cold, with some of the winter barleys getting a little bit pale in colour. There is a little rhynchosporium about, but the barleys are generally quite clean. Most wheats are generally sitting at the 3 – 4 leaf stage with little disease present. They have less of a weed problem. Winter oilseed rape is very well established. There are still volunteer cereals present in a few crops. They also have some light leaf spot in them.

Lanarkshire

With temperatures dropping to low single figures, most winter crops are tillering well and look in good condition to see them through the winter. Despite some recent heavy rainfall, ground conditions are still reasonable for the time of year. There is little pressure from weeds or disease at this point. There is still some stock in the fields, tidying up this year's abundance of grass. The effect of the recent rain can be seen in some fields with higher stocking rates. It won't take much more rain before the remaining stock will be housed.

Ayrshire

The weather has continued to be unsettled over the past couple of weeks with some frosty mornings in Ayrshire. Cover crops generally look well although some have had issues with some species in the mix not establishing as well as others. Winter cereals are also looking well with some fields at GS 15.

Stranraer

Total annual rainfall to date is still on average about 30% behind the 5 year average across the south west corner but rain days are no longer few and far between. The last cuts of silage have been taken but the impact on soils from the volume of traffic at this time of year has to be taken into account, and will no doubt have an effect on next year's crop.

Winter cereals have established well and are looking healthy with winter barley so far not showing signs of manganese deficiency. Winter oats are typically at 2 leaves and winter wheats at GS 23. There has been a slight increase in the area of WOSR grown this year and with good sowing conditions and a robust pre-emergence, crops look strong. There has been some late caterpillar damage in brassica crops and for the WOSR light leaf spot looks like it will no doubt be imminent. For the more minority crops, fodder beet has yielded well and recovered well from the dry spell during June and July, harvest is underway for some of the crops being lifted. Pumpkin plantings have been up on last year as more farms diversify into 'pick your own'. Maize harvest is almost complete and will have been slightly earlier this year. The areas planted under plastic have been the most successful but, like a lot of agricultural practices the use of non-degradable plastic may come into question. There is still an abundance of grass in the region but with the weather turning most cows are housed or about to be housed. Care will need to be taken on how these long grass swards are managed throughout the winter to minimise soil damage if livestock are still grazing and going into Spring, to ensure swards are not too long and limit growth of new tillers and clover. With high fertiliser prices, clover is going to play an increasing role in improving the quality of swards and reducing reliance on inorganic Nitrogen, so early spring management of grass covers will be critical.