

8 July 2021

General comments

After the very dry spring many crops were short and growth regulator inputs were reduced compared to the norm. Torrential rain has not been good for nerves, but crops are generally shorter and still standing. Disease levels are low, also a result of the dry spring, but the risk of yield loss as a result of disease is a key driver of fungicide inputs. Straw strength and disease resistance are two of the traits you might be looking for in your variety choices for next season, in addition to yield and market, and in this edition of the report we have produced thumbnail sketches of winter barley and winter oilseed rape varieties of note.

Regional comments

Orkney

The spring barley crops are all at various stages of ear emergence and are generally free of disease which has been helped in part by the dry weather conditions. However, there are certain fields affected by net blotch which may be linked to the seed. The cold May and dry June has taken its toll, with straw length short and silage crops not bulking as much as they need to. Direct reseeds are also suffering badly.

Caithness

Another excellent spell of weather has seen spring crops fully catch up compared to last year's crops. Potatoes in the area, although planted later, have come away well. Turnips sown are certainly struggling with lack of water and germination success has been mixed. Silage and hay making continues in great conditions but with bulk still down on last year.

Moray

Ground conditions have continued to dry rapidly over the past two weeks with a large amount of spring barley now showing stress with drought. Spring barley also appears to be much shorter than usual, particularly those that were later sown, likely due to the cold spring leading into the warmer summer making the crop bolt to a head, which may suggest a straw scarcity for the coming winter. On the positive side, disease levels are low in most crops. Winter cereals are faring better in the weather conditions and winter barley is now well on and the heads are starting to get heavy, wheat is well through flowering and pods are filling on the oilseed rape, although seeds are still green. After a late first cut of silage, the grassland is taking its time to recover for future cuts and is also burning up. With Moray now on a SEPA water shortage alert level, many are holding

out for a good shower of rain to allow the crops to recover and fill the seed heads before the drought begins to affect overall grain yields.

Inverness

The Inverness area has seen rain for the first time in several weeks over the past few days. This rain was badly needed in some parts of the region. Heavy ground has coped but lighter soils have started to see patches burning off. Hopefully this rain will be just in time for good grain fill, however some crops have already suffered. Spring barley crops are entering milk development stage and some Ramularia is present but on the whole crops are clean. Winter Barley is now at soft dough, Winter Wheat is on average watery ripe. OSR crops are clean and seeds are now green. The dry weather has however seen a lot of hay made in the area in excellent conditions.

Banff & Buchan

The dry and sunny spell has given way to much more changeable weather, although in some areas the rain is felt to be much needed after a dry June– just as long as it remembers to go off again! The fine spell of weather has meant that most crops in the area looking well. Winter Barleys are beginning to turn, wheats have received their ear washes and the pods are starting to fill in the oilseed rape. Most spring barleys have had their T2 although the changeable weather will increase the risk of disease creeping into the crops, whether it be Rhynchosporium or ramularia. With CTL out of the picture this may be the first year to really test the alternatives. Elsewhere potato roguing is ongoing with crops relatively clean and free of disease– crops are at various stages with some at waist height and some still to meet across the drills. There is a fear that the wet weather also brings wind with the subsequent damage letting in the roguers “delight” – blackleg into crops making the task much more difficult. Thoughts are turning to 2022 harvest, in terms of cropping plans and varieties and with good forward prices on offer there is some optimism – this has been tempered somewhat when growers have asked for fertiliser prices with significant price rises year on year.

Kincardineshire

Generally, all the crops in the ground are looking well in the area. The last few days has seen some much-needed rain in Deeside as grass was beginning to burn up in area. Spring barley is now fully headed and flowering, with final sprays now applied and looks to be reasonably disease free. Winter wheat also now flowering but a lot of mildew present in the crop. Winter barley is on the turn with the recent sunshine we have had and yield potentials looking good. Tattie crops are all looking well with a later sowing date than normal but have now caught up, blight could be a potential problem with the changeable weather though. First cut silage is now all in, yields are back on last year, but the quality seems good.

Angus

Crops in Angus are generally looking well with recent rainfall having freshened things up. Winter barley crops are starting to turn, winter wheat crops are towards the end of flowering and beginning grain fill and winter oilseed rape is at the seed expanding stage. Spring crops are more of a mixed bag with crops on heavy land having lost tillers and looking a bit thin whilst crops on lighter land look very well.

Perthshire

Rainfall over the past few days has been welcome and should help crops reach their potential at the grain fill stage. Winter barley crops are changing colour now and winter oilseed rape is at the seeds expanding stage. Winter wheat is approaching grain fill and crops generally look well with only low levels of Septoria to be found in the bottom leaves or the more susceptible varieties. Spring barley crops are flowering and mostly look

well having benefited from the recent rainfall. Thoughts are now moving towards getting grain stores cleaned out and planning for the next season.

Fife

Winter barley crops are turning yellow and grain is doughy ripe. Head size looks good with big bold grain, hopefully this will carry through to harvest. Disease levels on the remaining leaves are low. Spring barleys have had T2 (some later crops on higher ground will be into next week till they get their T2s) and overall disease levels are low but spots of *Rhynchosporium* can be found appearing on the older leaves. Winter wheat ranges from mid-flowering to flowering complete and T3 fungicides are applied, upper canopy and heads look clean in the main. On less resistant varieties, evidence of controlled yellow rust can be found on the flag-leaf. Oilseed rape fields mostly have full sized pods with green seeds, leaves are rapidly dying back!

Lothians

For most areas across the Lothians, rainfall in the first week of July has exceeded June's monthly total (eg Gifford 37.4mm June and 41.2mm 1st to 6th July. Bush 27mm June and 33mm 1st to 6th July). Coastal areas are perhaps the exception with lighter rains than inland over the last several days. Crops, in the main however, have withstood the heavy localized downpours in the absence of high winds. Winter barley is at GS83-84 (soft dough) and spring barley, at GS59 (ears completely emerged), is very clean. Depending on their drilling date, wheats are now growing through Milk Development stages (GS71-77) and into Early Dough. A benchmark ear count at this stage is 460 ears/m² in wheat. Winter oilseed rape is at green seed. Mid - raceme pod production loss is clearly evident in some crops due to the earlier frosts although the remaining pod fill looks bold and there is no evidence of any stem/soil-based disease.

Borders

25mm of rain over last weekend was welcome. Wheat is flowering, spring barley heads have emerged, and sprayers have been busy over the last week delivering final fungicide sprays. Some winter barley crops are beginning to turn. Disease levels remain low. *Septoria tritici* remains on the bottom leaf in wheat with low levels of ramularia in winter barley. Some crops are showing higher levels of ramularia together with tan spot and *Rhynchosporium* but at this late stage unlikely to affect yield. Spring barley is remarkably clean. Oilseed rape shows little change with seeds still at the green stage.

Stirling

The dry weather last week has had most have a go at making hay, which many got in before the rain fell at the weekend. Grasses are heading and many graziers are struggling to maintain quality swards with many topping to remove the stemmier forage. Winter barley crops are dense and tall, with a few fields having grass weed issues. The cases of loose smut found are increasing which is disappointing for any fields intending to be kept for seed. Below the flag leaf the lower leaves contain scars from powdery mildew, and *Rhynchosporium* is evident in some crops although at a low level. The flag leaves are mostly clean, however, some ramularia is present, although the green leaf area is rapidly diminishing as the crop ripens. The majority are at the soft dough stage. Winter Oilseed Rape is looking well with moderate sized pods filling out. There is little pest damage in the pods, however upper and lower leaves have been hit hard from various slugs, flea beetles and caterpillars. There were a few cases of the pod midge, but no cabbage seed weevil noticed. Winter wheat, like all crops, are standing well despite the heavy downpours. In some crops, *Septoria tritici* has splashed onto the flag leaves where protection has been poor and is present on the lower leaves as well. Some of the crops have yellow patches on the heavier ground and this is most likely poorer rooting plants being affected by the dry weather. There are few aphids around. Spring barleys are clean with their growth stages between a quarter and full head emerged, the earliest will have just started flowering. Some of the crops look a bit short but healthy. No pest or weed presence is impacting crops in general here. All in all, growers and farmers are happy, rain came at the right time and harvest is not far round the corner.

Lanarkshire

After a dry spell, localised heavy showers have helped grain to swell in some places while others are needing moisture. The places that did not see rain are where winter barley can be seen lightening in colour. Spring barley and winter wheat crops are also variably developing based on localised rainfall and soil type. Good grass growth and dry weather has tempted many to make hay. As with arable crops, areas with light soils that have not seen rain are starting to see grass growth slow down.

Ayrshire

Farmers here in Ayrshire have been embracing the good weather over the past fortnight and taken the opportunity to make hay while the sun shines. Localised showers have now started to creep in, which along with the heat is bringing on crop development. Crops are generally looking clean, with few weeds and only minor pest damage. The spring barley is getting through ear emergence (GS 55), with a small amount of ramularia starting to show but not enough to cause an issue. Winter crops are looking well and have all entered milk development with crops between the watery ripe and early milk stages (GS71-GS73). Some evidence of septoria leaf spot at around 2% leaf coverage, but generally winter crops are looking well.

Stranraer

The Southwest has managed to evade the heaviest of rain over the last couple of weeks and the dry conditions are starting to show on shallower ground. Forage crops are being sown and for those being direct drilled, there is enough moisture being retained in the soil but more rain is needed. The first combines were out in Drummore last week harvesting Winter Barley for crimping and main harvest won't be far away. With no rain forecast grass growth is a concern so taking stock early and early purchase for any winter feed shortfall would be wise.