

15 September 2022

General Comments

Early drilled crops are emerging well and have largely benefited from the rain. Slugs have speedily made their way to the surface after such a dry summer and causing a bit of damage but nothing too dramatic yet. There are also a few reports of flea beetle damage in some oilseed rape crops but nothing like the levels seen in the south. Potato harvest has started, and as expected yields are down where dry conditions have limited tuber bulking.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

Whilst the rest of the country is probably looking back with satisfaction at another completed harvest, the same cannot be said for Orkney where around half the spring barley crops remain standing and a good portion more of the straw remains in the bout. Being located this far north and with global warming seemingly making the weather patterns more unsettled, it feels like Orkney is on the very outer edge of where barley can reliably be grown and harvested successfully. As days shorten, weather becomes more unsettled, and risk of equinoctial gales heighten – farmers truly need mental strength to endure this annual harvest battle. On a more uplifting note, those crops which have been harvested are yielding well, and grazing grass is still lush and plentiful.

CAITHNESS

A mixed period of weather has seen combine start and stop, albeit there has been a lot of harvest completed with straw baled and cleared too. Most Spring Barley has been harvested with some farms now onto spring oats. The general trend appears to be yield being good without any records being broken, while there is generally less straw. Moisture rates have continued to be excellent. Some winter crop is also now back in the ground in good conditions.

INVERNESS

The past fortnight has seen warm weather with some significant rainfall in the Inverness area. The rain has been very much welcomed; however, it did catch out a few growers who had not quite finished harvest. Oilseed rape is looking and well and benefitting from the moisture. Winter barley sowing is just beginning in the area. Grass growth has also benefited from the rain.

ABERDEENSHIRE

After all the wet weather last week, combines are rolling again to try and finish harvesting of spring crops, but moisture contents are higher, and the usual dilemmas associated with harvest have resumed – no record low moisture contents reported this week! With such mild but wet weather last week, there are also reports of sprouting in the head, which will have significantly affected the quality of the remaining malting barley that needs to be cut, as the golden shine has been dampened down. On the flip side however, for those sowing winter crops, and livestock farmers looking for more grass as autumn approaches, the rain has been welcomed, and enabled winter oilseed rape to grow away from flea beetle issues. The wet weather however has brought out the slugs, and a constant vigil has been required to monitor crop damage. Despite the rain however the ground is still relatively dry and is providing an ideal seed bed for winter barley and wheat sowings. Potatoes are also starting to be lifted. Reports are also being heard from farmers who have tried green cover crops for the first-time last autumn, that they have seen a benefit in their spring barley crops this year and are busy sowing cover crops again to help retain as much nutrients as possible in the soil over winter.

BANFF & BUCHAN

Autumn has undoubtedly arrived, with noticeably shorter days and much more changeable weather. This has frustrated those growers still trying to tidy up harvest, barley crops remaining in the field are starting to brackle over with couch and AMG becoming more noticeable. The weather has also slowed up the drilling of winter barleys. The warm soils and recent moisture however have seen crops germinate very quickly, none more so than the oilseed rape crops which have reached their third leaf. Volunteer barleys are a problem that needs to be addressed although flea beetle and slug damage has thankfully been minimal. Fertiliser prices, or perhaps the inability to even get a quote has become a cause for concern and frustration for growers although futures prices for next harvest means there is at least a chance to lock in at good prices to provide some comfort. In the same vein grain merchants have revealed their “spot” prices for malting barley which means that growers have achieved a grand slam of good yields, good weather, good quality and now good prices. Potato lifting continues and cattle are being housed with grass struggling to recover from the dry summer.

KINCARDINESHIRE

Harvest in the south of Kincardineshire is all but finished up with only a few small areas left. Along Deeside, slightly more to be done but should be well on by end of the week, weather permitting. Yields on Deeside are good to average considering the dry summer. Oilseed Rape is emerging well thanks to a welcome spell of rain, but growers will need to be vigilant for flea beetle and slugs, especially in those fields that have been minimum tilled. Potato harvest is beginning to get underway, no reports on yield or quality yet.

ANGUS

Harvest in Angus is nearing completion, with only spring beans left to combine. New season crops are being established with many growers sowing winter barley and some turning to winter wheat drilling. Oilseed rape has made a great start and most crops are now beyond the stages where slugs or flea beetles are a cause for concern. Heavy rain showers last week have caused substantial soil erosion on finer seedbeds, and growers are urged to consider the erosion risk when selecting fields for winter cropping.

PERTSHIRE

Whilst harvest is largely wrapped up, there are still a few fields left to be combined in the later parts of the area. Heavy rain put pay to any work on the land last week and many areas have seen flooding and severe run off. Farmers are gradually getting back on the land and drilling has recommenced. Flea beetles were seen in oilseed rape with some crops having received insecticide, but most crops are now well advanced and less vulnerable. Slug levels are still relatively low, but eggs can be found amongst trash in fields which have a history of slugs.

FIFE

Weather stops play! Harvest and autumn seeding has ground to a halt due to large volumes of rain. Only isolated pockets of wheat and barley are still to be harvested, mostly on higher ground and they are only just becoming ripe. A 3-day dry spell would allow these fields to be cleared. Field beans are starting to ripen off with some thinking of cutting in next week to ten days, weather permitting. This is still a lot earlier than most years for bean harvesting in this area! New season oilseed rape is up and away with the earliest sown crops showing good leaf cover already. The latest sown crops are around 2 – 3 leaf stage and don't seem to have been badly damaged by flea beetle. Those that have waited to see what would germinate before applying herbicides are now waiting for ground conditions to be favourable for carrying a sprayer. Ground conditions will also need to dry before winter barley and wheat seeding can be carried out. The forecast going forward from 13th September looks more settled and drier.

STIRLINGSHIRE

In the Stirling region on the whole harvest has been completed with only a very small number of crops left to cut. With the recent wet conditions some straw is still lying in field waiting to bale. OSR was largely planted into damp seedbeds with enough moisture to allow good germination. In some areas heavy concentrated rainfall has slowed the crop down and encouraged slug populations with reports of crop damage. Some wheat crops have been drilled but we expect the bulk of growers to start early wheats in the next week or two with winter barley towards the end of the month.

LOTHIANS

September to date has given even rainfall across the Lothians with elevated amounts centred east of the Pentland Hills, (eg Dunbar 70mm, Haddington 54mm, Harelaw 63mm, Harperig 78mm) and much of this falling on/around 8th of the month. Pockets of standing crop remain but are few and far between. Rape has gone in again in earnest, buoyed by the ease of growing last year's crop and in most cases has grown away from flea beetle risk. A shift from pre-emergence to post emergence weed control in rape is more and more evident as growers look to reduce the risk of front-loading crop cost ahead of a viable establishment. Some early wheat has gone in under min-till regimes and there's plenty of ground moved purely to flush weeds in false seedbeds. Digestate and muck spreaders are actively working. Forage crops of turnip and fodder beet look well given the dry start around establishment.

BORDERS

The welcome rain of over 50mm last week delayed the end of the cereal harvest which is now drawing to a close with only a few crops of spring barley to cut and straw to bale. Comments from growers suggest yields of grain and straw have been above average and the price of straw ex-farm has dropped as local demand has fallen. Nitrogen levels in spring malt barley have been lower than average with grain quality good and few rejected loads. With the dry conditions winter rape had been slow to get going and has been under pressure from flea beetle. Sowing of autumn cereals is now underway.

LANARKSHIRE

Some more unsettled weather has led to a slowdown in field work in the area. Little or no grain is still to combine, but any further preparation for winter sown crops has come to a halt. An improving forecast for the next week may encourage some to sow. Despite some very heavy downpours, ground conditions are still good, if a little greasy on top. Grass is still abundant, and some are still planning to make another cut of silage.

STRANRAER

As harvest comes to a close, attention turns to winter sowing. Ploughing is well underway with some winter barley crops already sown. Ground conditions are generally good despite the deluges of rain. There appears to be no major plans to change the crops and areas being planted despite the uncertainty of input costs. Black caterpillars have hit the forage crops this week, slightly later than usual so if you have any forage crops sown it would be worth monitoring these for damage and speaking to your local agronomist. Forage crops have had a good growing year and look to be on track to yield well.