

17 March 2022

General Comments

A period of more spring like weather means crops are starting to lift and field work gets underway with more intensity. We have the first report of yellow rust in Fife and Ayrshire which is not entirely unexpected given the advanced and thick nature of crops over a milder than average winter. The general feeling is that we are waiting on soil temperatures to rise before these crops can really start growing away. Met office data for early March showed 30cm soil temperatures averaging 4.8, 5.4 and 5.7 degrees C, across N.E, S.E, and S.W Scotland respectively; we've some way to go yet.

Regional Comments

CAITHNESS

As fertiliser and fuel continue to cause consternation, a welcome ray of sunshine has been the improved weather over the period. It has seen manure spreaders, slurry spreaders and ploughs back out in full flow. It has also given fresh impetus to the winter crops in the area which were already looking good following an easier winter. Fodder continues to sell well locally, both at the auction mart and privately where trade has been storing for silage, hay and straw, in contrast to last year at this time when it was difficult to find a new home.

MORAY

As we approach the spring equinox, preparations for sowing spring barley crops are advancing and some should be sowing next week. Ground conditions are generally dry after a spell of good weather, interrupted by the odd wintry shower. Winter barley crops have moved on a bit and would now be at or nearing GS30, whilst winter wheat crops are still at mid tillering and oilseed rape crops are at stem extension stage. Disease levels are all still moderate in terms of mildew and light leaf spot.

INVERNESS

Largely dry and warmer weather has continued in the Inverness area. There have been some showers and temperatures dropping to near freezing overnight. Ploughing is well underway, and some growers are starting to think about sowing. Winter crops are looking well with the warmer, drier days and wheat has been top dressed. Grass fields are beginning to green up now as well.

BANFF & BUCHAN

While the days are stretching and there is plenty sunshine, it is still quite cold, not helped by the biting winds. Crops are starting to come away however, oilseed rapes are responding to their first nitrogen, looking much greener and starting to grow upwards again. Winter barleys are quite mixed- some crops are looking very pale, looking hungry for nitrogen as well as manganese in places. Crops which have received nitrogen and manganese are looking greener and healthier. Winter wheats continue to slowly grow away, with fields greening up. While the sun is welcome, all crops could benefit from a spell of warmth to really get them going. Crops are still quite clean – both in terms of disease and weeds. Ploughed land is starting to dry and there will surely be some tempted to try sowing spring crops later this week however the ground still looks and feels very raw – well sown, half grown is so often true, so patience may be the order of the day. Spiralling fertiliser and fuel prices have shared top billing as topics of conversation in the last week, although there is also talk of previously unheard of grain prices to lighten the mood, in particular oilseed rape. Feed barley prices have also risen significantly recently with prices received far greater than those received for the malting crop a few months ago. Elsewhere calving and lambing is ongoing with livestock farmers hoping for an early spring to minimise expensive feed costs.

ANGUS

Fertiliser has been applied to oilseed rape in most instances with some winter cereals also receiving the first application of nitrogen. Wet weather has prevented spring sowing from commencing, however cultivations are up to date on most farms. Recent price hikes for fuel and fertiliser are causing considerable concern for growers, some of whom are now looking ahead to next year to purchase inputs.

PERTSHIRE

Crops are beginning to waken from winter and are starting to pick up nutrients. Winter oilseed rape is into stem extension and thoughts turn to the spring light leaf spot fungicide. Winter barley is greening up and disease remains present at low levels. Winter wheat tends to have Septoria present in most crops and the first nitrogen applications are beginning to go on. Drilling of spring cereals has not yet begun as there have been a couple of significant rain events over the last few weeks, however as soon as things dry up there will be a lot sown in a short space of time.

STIRLINGSHIRE

The recent wet weather has eased enough for machine to travel on land to get first applications of fertilisers on oilseed rape and winter barley. Machines overall are travelling well and not causing too much damage to tramlines. Crops are moving very slowly but strong winds, colder temperatures and recent heavy rain haven't led to ideal growing conditions. Winter barley is starting to show signs of stress in compacted areas (manganese and nitrogen deficiency) but these should disappear as the weather warms up. Winter wheat is largely holding colour well and oilseed rape in places is starting to recover from pigeon damage and green up. Disease levels in all crops are quite low.

LOTHIANS

Those wheats that were established in September and are carrying 2 or 3 tillers are bringing a worryingly high level of Septoria through with them and will warrant a TO to check infection rates. No signs of yellow rust as yet however in these crops in this area. Forward winter barleys are cleaner by comparison and mildew is absent. Those who can travel in field have made first applications of Nitrogen to oilseed rape and barley and are now moving through the wheats. Any early travel opportunities to work ploughed ground in the first half of March has been hindered by higher-than-average rainfall through February (North Berwick 67mm, Haddington 77mm, Dalkeith 110mm).

August-sown rape is well advanced seemingly for the time of year having started extending and some green buds are already clearly visible in the most forward of crops. Much less cabbage stem larvae is evident compared to last season and light leaf spot hard to find with the visible eye.

BORDERS

To date, there has been 22mm of rain for March, with crops beginning to green up. Oilseed rape is at stem extension, with some more advanced crops at green bud. Most crops have received fertiliser and been sprayed for light leaf spot. Cleavers and mayweed are present in some crops, prompting some growers to apply herbicide, with green bud stage being the latest timing for treatment. Winter wheat is tillering (GS22–GS23). Disease pressure remains low on most crops, however growers should remain vigilant of yellow rust. There are very high tiller numbers on winter barley and many crops have received fertiliser applications. Disease pressure remains low, however mildew and Rhynchosporium can be found on some crops at low levels.

LANARKSHIRE

Spells of dry weather interrupted by heavy rain has meant that winter crops on heavier ground have still not seen any fertiliser. This has led to further yellowing as the plant comes under nutrient stress. This is particularly apparent in field sown early, last year. Some fields with lighter soil have had some muck and slurry applied with a few managing to get it ploughed. Grassland has had more slurry spread in the last fortnight. This has been influenced by pressure on storage, but with temperatures rising, this will boost growth. A good forward weather forecast will be pleasing to all, but especially for those starting lambing and calving.

AYRSHIRE

Weather has been hit and miss in Ayrshire over the last couple of weeks, with some lovely spring like days where it looked like the ground was drying up nicely then followed by days with heavy rain. With ground conditions being wet, slurry stores are filling up as many people would have had this out already. Ploughing in the region is behind where it would usually be with only the odd field ploughed, whereas usually a lot would have been done by now. Some people have managed to get their first dressing of Nitrogen on to winter crops and others in the region looking like they could really be doing with it. Some evidence of yellow rust in some winter crops, but still growing well and tillering nicely.

STRANRAER

February saw rainfall in excess of 150mm in parts of the southwest which has slowed up ground work. Early fertiliser is onto some of the forward winter barley crops and with a good forecast for next few days, ploughing will get underway. Some are targeting early drilling for spring crops to try and overcome the issue with dry seedbeds that we have seen over the last few years. Disease pressure is generally low with crops having come through the winter well. Soil temperatures are sitting around 6-7 but there is hesitancy to apply fertiliser to grassland just yet and ground conditions are still quite soft. The forecast for the coming week may encourage a few farmers to get the fertiliser spreader out before lambing and calving really kicks off.