

17 February 2022

General comments

Autumn drilled crops have come through the winter well. With very few frost days and hardly any winter weather (yet!) they are forward and in good condition but there has been little chance to knock back early disease. Diseases like light leaf spot in rape, mildew in barley and Septoria in wheat are already evident and will need careful monitoring during the season to address the risk appropriately. That said, in some ways seasons like this are the easiest to manage. Crop potential looks good, and pest and disease risk may be higher – input decisions are hardest when crop potential and prices are low and disease risk isn't very evident.

Regional Comments

CAITHNESS

Similar to early 2021, there is a good percentage of ground ploughed in preparation for spring sowing. Having had a good start winter crops are looking surprisingly good even with the recent spell of wet weather. Fodder and straw supplies will certainly be tighter than previous years when there was an abundance in the area. Fertiliser costs and rising fuel costs continue to be at the forefront of minds

MORAY

The closed period for bagged fertiliser applications in the Moray NVZ area ends this weekend (20th February) and fertiliser applications will follow when ground and air temperatures pick up a bit. Although this past week or 10 days has been quite wet, ground conditions remain dry and good in general. Winter oilseed rape crops are looking a bit off-colour and patchy in some cases and could do with that fertiliser application. In general crops are at about eight or nine leaves with some showing the usual signs of light leaf spot. There are traces of mildew to be found on lower leaves in both winter wheat and winter barley, but frosts have kept it in check and newer leaves are clean. Winter wheat crops range from two leaves to early tillering stage whilst winter barley crops are further ahead at mid tillering. Preparations for spring barley sowing are well advanced.

INVERNESS

The past few weeks of wintry weather have been a distinct change from an otherwise very dry and mild winter. A lot of ploughing has been done in the area, with conditions very favourable until the past two weeks. As expected with such a warm autumn, winter crops are still looking exceptionally leafy and lush. With little in the way of frosts there has been little winter kill and crops were growing until this recent cold snap. However, disease can be seen in winter barley.

ABERDEENSHIRE

Aberdeenshire has benefitted greatly from a mild and (relatively calm) January except from a few very windy days. Winter crops are looking very good, with lots of potential at present, having been established in good order. There are small levels of disease present, but the frosts appear to be taking care of this at present. Lots of ploughing has been undertaken, with the ground being exceptionally dry for this time of year. With T-SUM very close to 200, early applications of fertiliser onto oilseed rape and winter barley will not be far away.

BANFF & BUCHAN

Crops have come through the winter fairly well – while the winter will be remembered for the high winds brought by various storms, there has been little snow or prolonged spells of very cold weather. Oilseed rape crops still look strong with higher than normal green area indexes and little sign of light leaf spot. Winter barleys have started to grow and are, on the whole, fairly clean although there are visible signs of manganese deficiency in some crops. Winter wheats have been slower to come away, however plant populations are good and are free of disease. The end of the closed period for nitrogen applications is upcoming which will see growers anxious to get some fertiliser on to winter crops to help get them up and away as temperatures and day length increases. Preparations for spring crops continue, with farm yard manure being applied when ground conditions allow and most growers are almost up to date with ploughing. High fertiliser prices remain a hot topic and growers have now bought this year's requirements at two or even three times last year's prices, although this has been softened by the high forward prices for grain being offered.

ANGUS

A mild January has left many winter sown crops green and lush, however there is some yellowing in places where crops have begun to run out of nitrogen. Great progress has been made with winter ploughing due to the low rainfall in Angus last month. Many growers are considering fertiliser rates for the coming season with large variation in the prices paid.

PERTSHIRE

Crops have come through the winter well so far and generally stronger than usual, but disease can be found quite readily. The big question is, have we had our winter yet as thoughts turn to getting nitrogen applications on, which at the price it is, we need to make best use of it. Ground conditions have been ideal for getting any muck spread, ploughing done and many have taken the opportunity to get lime applied to help get the maximum benefits of fertiliser when it is applied.

STIRLINGSHIRE

Some winter ploughing has been done in the area. All now stopped due to the wet conditions. Crops in general looking well but the recent cold and wet weather will be having an effect. All winter cereals are tillering and have moved little over the winter. Disease is low, some mildew and Rhynchosporium on the winter barley at a low level and Septoria on winter wheat mainly on the old lower leaves. Winter oilseed rape is patchy in places particularly on the headlands. Some crops have been well grazed by pigeons, deer etc but they are well established and will survive.

LOTHIANS

At the time of writing, we await the arrival of "Storm Dudley" which is set to bring more wintry showers and high winds. January has been anecdotally very dry with ground conditions being favourable towards the end of the month. However, as it stands in February heavy rain over the previous weekend across much of the Lothians have delayed progress with winter ploughing. On the whole crops have come through the winter well with barley, wheat and rape all looking well. Crops have tillered well through the winter and generally disease levels remain low. Across the NVZ in the Lothians as of the 16th February we are now out of the closed period for spreading bagged nitrogen. However, until ground conditions and soil temperatures improve its unlikely there will be much activity with fertiliser spreaders.

BORDERS

After an exceptionally dry January, 38mm of rain has been recorded at Greycrook so far this month. Winter barley has come through the winter well, with some crops with up to 5 tillers. Evidence of past mildew but few live spores seen. Winter wheat has 1-2 tillers with low levels of Septoria on older dying leaves. Oilseed rape has very good ground cover, still in leaf production stage, but stem extension can't be far away in this mild weather. Buds are present but enclosed. Low levels of light leaf spot are evident as would be expected at this time of year. Significant localised pigeon damage has been seen in some crops.

LANARKSHIRE

The limited amount of winter crops in the area have done well in what has been a mild winter, so far. Despite the above average temperature and high plant population, disease is not yet a problem. Although still early in the season, increasingly wet weather is making ground conditions less than favourable for those wanting to get on early with fertiliser or crop protection. Good growth conditions for crops are also starting to encourage some weed growth. Poor ground conditions have meant that little muck or slurry spreading has started, although the occasional field on lighter ground has already seen the plough. Grass growth has been tremendous all winter with those planning for lambing and calving hoping for some drier weather to take full advantage.

AYRSHIRE

January was a mild and dry month; however, February seems to be making up for the lower rainfall with lots of heavy, sometimes wintry showers. Grazing fields that have had stock moved through them are looking brown in areas. Winter cereals are a mixed bag, some looking ok and some starting to look pale. Fields intended for spring crops are still in stubble, with rain forecast for the next couple of weeks it could be a while before ground conditions are suitable for any cultivations.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

The weather in the past couple of weeks has turned cold and wet after having one of our warmest driest Januarys recorded. With the warmer weather, the winter crops have been steadily growing and are more advanced than a typical year. The crops are still fairly green and showing no signs of needing their first nitrogen applications yet. I would expect to see first nitrogen dressings being applied by the end of this month to the middle of March. Some earlier drilled winter barleys are showing higher signs of disease especially powdery mildew and they will most likely need a T0 fungicide applied. Grass has also been steadily growing and the dry weather has allowed farmers to get on with early slurry applications which has taken some pressure off full stores. Let's hope the winter weather is still not to come!

STRANRAER

Winter crops were sown into good soil conditions in the autumn and at the moment plant populations look promising. There are a few crops of winter barley which are suffering with manganese deficiency, despite autumn applications and with current soil conditions and wet weather forecast, it is unlikely there will be an opportunity to remedy this deficiency in the coming weeks. For some, this will have a significant impact on the yield potential of the crop. Winter wheats are generally looking fine. Soil temperatures in the southwest are today sitting at 8.8 degrees, so it will be ground conditions which will dictate progress with early fertiliser over the coming month. Plans for spring crops are well underway and it appears that the sown area will not be affected by rises in fertiliser, fuel and energy. Making use of production costs figures will help the decision making process on whether fertiliser rates are adjusted, but it will be the attention to detail on soil fertility, application timings and methods that ensure high utilisation of any fertiliser applied.