

03 August 2023

General Comments

With wet weather, comes a fairly predictable host of problems. Sooty moulds and fusarium are being seen in winter and spring cereals and there are reports of high levels of alternaria and similar sooty moulds on oilseed rape crops which are turning black as they wait for harvest. Slugs are enjoying the wet conditions which is worth keeping in mind for the crops that will follow on. Areas of winter cereals have lodged in heavy wind and rain, and this makes harvest an even slower and damper affair. In the affected crops reported the lodging doesn't seem to relate to stem-base disease. There are a lot of secondary tillers in crops this year.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

The weather has been quite mixed, but thankfully Orkney has managed to avoid much of the heavy rain which has fallen further south. Spring barley is at dough development, with the possibility of cutting in late August on some farms – weather permitting. This seemed an impossibility in May when the weather was so inhospitable, and the crops were so far behind. There have been reports that slurry which was applied using dribble bars in spring is still identifiable on the ground as strips of dry manure. The concern is that this may have contaminated silage crops which could increase the risk of abortions in cattle.

CAITHNESS

Finally, some decent weather as July was drawing to a close which meant winter harvest got underway in good conditions with straw getting baled up too. Spring crops have really pushed on during the period and are looking extremely well. Especially given the poor start they had and later sowing in the area. Turnips and potatoes in the area have also benefitted from the wetter July and while turnips are not quite where they should be they have recovered from looking like a total disaster earlier in the season. Some hay has been made now in the area, but a greater proportion of wrapped silage than normal are in the fields. There should be no shortage of fodder in the area.

MORAY

The remaining fields of winter barley have been secured and overall yields are reasonable but small lightweight grains for many. Winter oilseed rape crops remain uncut as producers wait for a suitable weather window to harvest, a bit concerning as many crops were sprayed off over two weeks ago now. Winter wheat crops are on the turn as grains start to firm up. Spring barley crops look to have reasonable yield potential without reaching last year's levels and there seems to be a lot of secondary or late tillers in many spring barley crops which may require a glyphosate treatment this year.

ABERDEENSHIRE

Winter barley harvest has continued over the past couple of weeks, yield reports have been mixed. Desiccation of oilseed rape has also commenced. Many have continued with second cut silage, and hay making in some areas where weather has permitted.

BANFF & BUCHAN

Harvest has begun with good progress having been made with winter barleys. First reports indicate that in terms of yield, crops are very mixed, with some good yields being reported but plenty that would be described as average at best. Despite this, the barley seems to be quite heavy which should compensate for the lack of bulk. The weather of late has meant that crops have really needed 10 days following glyphosate before combining, with crops cut before this time being quite hard to clean properly with the combine. Oilseed rape crops are being swathed or desiccated with some crops ripening off very quickly, particularly where alternaria has crept in with the earlier spell of thundery showers and warm weather conducive to its development. Winter wheats are starting to ripen off, and on many farms will be cut before the spring barleys, which are also reaching maturity. Spring barleys in the area are a mixed bag, while grains seem to have filled well, despite the wetter weather, ramularia has now begun to creep in, though hopefully too late to do any damage. One other big issue in spring barley crops has been the prevalence of secondary growth and tillers in crops. This will take careful management to ensure samples meet malting specifications. In addition, there are some small, lodged areas of spring barley where there are high levels of residual fertility, and some growers are reporting some blind grain sites. Potatoes have now been inspected and are starting to have haulms flailed off, with the countdown having begun until lifting.

ANGUS

The heavy rainfall has continued in Angus, but occasional dry spells have allowed most of the winter barley crops to be harvested. Potatoes are continuing to make good progress, but there is sustained blight pressure due to the weather. If the spring barley crops are not being left to ripen naturally, then they are nearing the time for round-up to be applied over the next two weeks. Winter wheat is about to ripen, with plenty of fields having a decent head and grain size. Due to the weather, lodging remains an issue for spring barley and winter wheat crops. The oilseed rape crops have been sprayed with round-up over the last two weeks and are ready for combining once the weather provides a clear spell

PERTSHIRE

All winter oilseed rape has now been sprayed off with the first crops awaiting a weather window to allow the combine to make a start. Winter barley harvest is complete. Secondary growth in spring barley means that more crops will need glyphosate before harvest this year and the earliest spring barley and winter wheat crops are now at the glyphosate stage. Drilling of the new crop of oilseed rape will satiate as soon as weather conditions allow but slug pressure is likely to be higher this year.

FIFE

Most winter barley crops are now harvested, with malting spec. crops being uplifted from farms quite quickly. Malting yields seem to be around 7.4t/ha within the nitrogen limits but screenings are higher than normal. Feed winter barley yields are reported as good, with a few reported as 9.8t/ha or better from stronger land (light land crops have burnt off early and so are reporting lower yield with high screenings). Winter wheat and spring barleys are ripening, though spring barleys seem to have had a late 2nd germination, especially in areas that were thin at germination in the dry spring, so now have dark green areas among the ripe looking areas. The constant cycle of rain and then heat plus wind is causing areas of both wheat and spring barley to go down, especially on overlaps or ex-midden areas. WOSR crops have been sprayed off and await the next dry spell to be harvested!

STIRLINGSHIRE

The weather continues to be wet over the last two weeks, yet ground conditions are still good, both on the carse and on the lighter ground. Also, despite the weather holding back harvest the winter barley harvest is complete with yields good but no crops appear to be record breakers. Winter wheats are ripe and those which have been well protected are looking good. Winter wheats that haven't been well protected have noticeably less grains per plant. Liquid sunshine (glyphosate) needed on some later sown winter wheat crops to kill off weeds and ripen the odd crop. The Spring barley crops are mostly clean however some have Ryncosporium splashed on the flag leaf. Most of these spring barley crops are relatively weed and pest free here. Crops continue to look short. There are some patches where the crop has gone down due to the rain, but these are limited and mainly where there has been overlap with fertiliser. Oilseed rape crops are nearly all ripe, pods are ready, still a bit of green in the stem but most crops been sprayed off a week now with glyphosate, no one has had a chance to harvest this yet. Alternaria present in crop due to the mild wet weather. For grass crops there has not been much of a weather window which has affected hay and haylage making. This delay is causing concern for a lot of timothy producers.

LOTHIANS

A high rainfall month for July; 80–100mm along the Lammermuir Hills and 120 mm recorded to the north-east at Whitburn, east of Edinburgh. Eastern coastal areas recording less, typically 45–68 mm, but local exceptions will have occurred. Considering the disruption, the rain has caused, progress has been consistent, and most winter barleys are now off; early indications are yields are slightly back on last year. Many rape crops will have been desiccated a couple of weeks now and await drying winds before any harvest progress can be made, meanwhile the damp conditions are exacerbating stem and pod disease and sooty mould infections, giving the crop a darkened appearance. Lodging in cereals is becoming increasingly evident in both wheat and spring barley. Secondary tillering and consequent ear development in spring barleys will likely precipitate some applications of pre-harvest glyphosate. Longer term forecast still remains questionable.

BORDERS

After what looked to be an early harvest, winter barley harvest slowed down with difficult weather conditions – 55mm of rain fell over the past 2 weeks with very few dry days. A small area of oilseed rape has been harvested whilst other fields are being desiccated and are ready for harvest as soon as dry weather arrives, it is a nervous time for growers with risk of pod shatter or sprouting. Winter wheat is at the hard dough stage. Spring barley is at soft dough, however, due to the wet conditions secondary growth can be found in spring barley and there are reports of sprouting. Some wheat crops have weeds growing up through the crops and there are flat crop areas in both wheat and spring barley.

LANARKSHIRE

The wet weather continues in Lanarkshire with seldom dry days and temperatures remaining in the mid-teens. Numerous spring barley crops in the area are now at the dough development growth stages. Winter barley is currently at GS91 and above with several farms harvesting when a break in the weather allows. One dairy farm has reported a yield of 3 tonnes to the acre at a moisture content of 18–21%. Oilseed rape is at GS89 with almost all pods ripened. The weather remains a main topic of conversation at the moment. With unpredictable downpours farmers are tentative to cut their second or third cut silage, but many find themselves taking the risk when a break in the weather occurs.

AYRSHIRE

Following another couple of weeks of rain there hasn't been much activity on the combining side in Ayrshire. July was a very wet month, with some areas getting over 150mm rain in total through July. Straw yield for some of the winter crop has been low and for some the straw hasn't been baled yet. After some very heavy showers a few crops have been going down. Spring barley is currently sitting around GS 77. Timing silage cuts has been difficult and in some places ground conditions are starting to get softer.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

The weather over the past two weeks has continued to be unsettled. Most winter barley crops been harvested with yields being reported to be significantly down on last year. The drought has had a big impact on grain fill with grain yields ranging from 5.5t–7.5t/ha. Spring barley crops look more promising however there is significant secondary growth in some lighter fields which suffered in the drought and glyphosate treatment will be required pre harvest. Second cut silages have been taken with good yield reports. Winter forage crops are currently being drilled into winter stubbles.

STRANRAER

Harvest remains challenging and frustrating. Winter barleys are complete and overall seem to have yielded quite well with most reports coming in around 3.5t/acre grain yield but with lower straw yields. Oilseed rape crops have yielded well, typically between 1.5–2t acre. Winter wheats are ready to harvest earlier than normal, but the opportunity is not there due to catchy weather, with some crops already going flat. A few spring crops have been taken early and been crimped but yields have been disappointing.

There has also been secondary growth in some spring crops depending on rainfall in May and June adding to the variability in crops. Weather is also disrupting silage harvest; however, grass growth and forage crops are enjoying the vary damp summer weather.