

31 March 2022

General Comments

Spring crops are now going in at pace – with a small interruption now that we have a swing back to snow, rain, and colder conditions after a good dry spell. A little moisture is probably a good thing. Winter crops still look well as they begin to lift away and the disease that has overwintered is no more than would be expected after a benign winter with few frosts. Pesticide inputs are probably the least of the input stresses this season. With prices good and crops looking well then sensibly targeted programmes will help to protect crops. As ever, margins and environmental benefits can be improved by optimising product choices and dose, and savings can be made in lower risk situations. The early season options set out in the report take you step by step through that.

Regional Comments

CAITHNESS

A tremendous spell of weather has seen a lot of spring crop going into the ground in excellent conditions. Winter crops which had come through the winter period very well have really taken off in the period with temperatures up to around 17c. Grass growth is still somewhat slow, and fertiliser have been conspicuous by their absence so far with a lot of farmers holding off application until later in April.

MORAY

A glorious spell of early spring weather brought joy to many over the past weekend and a flurry of activity on the sowing front as many producers set about getting spring barley in the ground. That has been abruptly halted as there is snow on the ground now. Oilseed rape plants are getting quite tall now and are at flower bud stage with a few flowers beginning to emerge. Whilst not quite at stem elongation stage, winter cereals look greener and new growth is clean, perhaps as a result of fertiliser applications. That said there are many reports of *Rhynchosporium* and some *Septoria* on older leaves.

INVERNESS

Like the rest of the country Inverness has seen a spell of excellent warm weather over the past few weeks. This has seen spring sowing started in earnest. Winter crops are also responding to the warmer weather and top dressing with many now entering stem extension. Winter wheat are on the whole clean. Some Rhynchosporium can be seen in winter barley.

ABERDEENSHIRE

After a lovely week of weather with a bit of heat, crops have all come on leaps and bounds this fortnight, with the sowing of spring crops in full force now as soil temperatures rise. The wintry weather forecast for midweek may be a last bite of winter, and is tempering some folks' keenness to sow spring crops on heavier land, as we will all feel the difference in temperatures as they plummet again for a while. Looking on the bright side however, this should be a short-lived delay, and will provide some much needed moisture, to help keep crops growing well. There are traces of disease in winter barley appearing, as well as in oilseed rape crops, but wheat appears relatively clean at present. Robust T1 sprays will be needed to keep disease at bay, depending on how wet or wintry this cold snap will be, especially rain splash diseases like Rhynchosporium.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The fine spell of weather has seen a 10 day burst of sowing across the Banff and Buchan area with most farms having made good progress with the spring barley. The soil is however quite dry, and some moisture (although not too much) may be needed to get the best from pre-em herbicides. Elsewhere oilseed rape has stretched with many crops at or approaching welly boot height with light leaf spot sprays imminent. Oilseed rape crops are on the whole looking well and have managed to get in front of the pigeon menace although hopefully the expected cold blast later this week does not have the same effect as last years. Winter barleys and wheats remain clean and although growth is slow, increasing day length and warmth should get them going. The busy spell has been welcomed by many farmers as a chance to "get on with the job" – with escalating inputs and record levels for crop prices, there is a lot to think about for the year ahead, with the 2023 harvest also getting consideration. Some growers are looking at their EFA options to minimise the amount of land in fallow and allow more land to be cropped. Elsewhere, ewes and lambs are appearing in fields – a sure sign of spring and indications are that there are plenty of lambs.

KINCARDINESHIRE

The spell of good weather over the last month has seen a lot of field work getting underway. Drills have started going in all over Kincardineshire, getting early spring crops sown in the good conditions. Winter crops having had their first dose of nitrogen are now greening up and winter oilseed rape is coming into stem extension and looking very well with very little disease present at the moment. Given the dry weather there is very little disease present in any of the winter crops at this moment in time and not much pest damage is to be seen yet. Winter wheat and barley are both looking well having come through the winter with little hassle in the area and have just started spring growth again now that temperatures are up. The forecasted cold snap of weather will see crops slow down slightly but by the looks of the forecast, this will be short lived.

ANGUS

Great weather has made for some favourable conditions in Angus which has allowed spring sowing to get underway. Oilseed rape is at welly boot height in most cases, except those which have been hit with pigeons which are a little behind. Winter wheats are mostly between TO (where relevant) and T1's, crops look strong having come through the mild winter well. Odd farms have started planting potatoes, but this week's cold weather forecast has forced many growers to hold off for a bit longer yet.

PERTSHIRE

Cooler weather has slowed crop growth down again. However, fertiliser applications are mostly up to date as conditions have allowed this to progress largely unhindered. Winter cereals are approaching GS30 and disease has remained largely on older leaves. Winter oilseed rape is approaching green bud but pigeons have been hard on some crops. Spring sowing is well under way into mostly dry but cold seedbeds.

FIFE

The spell of settled dry weather has allowed a lot of spring barley to be sown this week past, for those meadow grass affected fields, pre-em weed control will be attempted before the weather breaks later this week. Nitrogen (and where not applied in the backend, phosphate and potash) has been applied to winter crops. Winter barleys have had a TO fungicide applied to control mildew. Winter wheats are growing away with some Septoria that will be controlled at T1 timing. Pustules of yellow rust have been seen in a very few fields of wheat in Fife, these fields will have had a TO applied in the last week. Winter oilseed rape growth stage ranges from wellie boot height, for those fields not hammered by pigeons and deer, down to plants with leaf skeletonised with new leaves developing where pigeons have been hard on fields. Some carrots and early calabrese/cauliflower fields have been planted and will be sheeted up with fleece over the next few days, hopefully not to be blown off by stormy weather!

STIRLINGSHIRE

Most crops in the area have now received first applications of fertilisers and on the whole machines have travelled well. Recent warm dry weather has aided the crops as new leaf production is notable in winter wheat and winter barley crops. OSR crops leaf area is increasing, starting to bulk, and extend. Locally some pollen beetle has been found in OSR. Disease levels are relatively low across the board due to recent dry weather.

LOTHIANS

The 2nd half of March provided a welcome opportunity to kick off the 2022 spring drilling campaign with most regions across the Lothians seeing a little over an inch of rain and the majority of that coming in the first 2 weeks of the month (month to date : Crichton 23mm, Gifford 34mm, Berwick 28mm). Despite the dry conditions there should be moisture sufficient for an even germination and seedbed consolidation straight behind the drill will in turn help both establishment and herbicide efficacy. Some have taken the opportunity to roll and consolidate winter wheats whilst field conditions permitted. The impending cold snap will invariably put the brakes on growth stage and disease development in winter sown crops however there's plenty of Septoria low down especially in those September sown wheats that will need targeting at T1. Oilseed rapes have pushed through the growth stages where pigeons haven't been an issue and appear in general more forward than this time last year; many will have gone through for Light Leaf Spot by now.

BORDERS

Lovely sunny weather over the past week has helped to warm the soil and has encouraged the oilseed rape to grow. Flower buds are raised above the leaves with some crops at the yellow bud stage. Light Leaf Spot is hard to find. The most advanced fields of winter wheat and winter barley are at growth stage 30. Winter barley continues to have a low disease pressure although some Rhynchosporium can be found at low levels. Concerningly high levels of Septoria can be found in winter wheat crops, making it important for farmers to consider their TO sprays. Spring barley has been planted over the past 10 days, with more fields ploughed ready for drilling.

LANARKSHIRE

Drier and warmer weather has seen ground conditions improve, letting field work get started in earnest. A large percentage of ploughing for spring crop is complete and some drilling has started while the good spell continues. Better ground conditions have also meant that much needed fertiliser has been applied to winter crops. These fields are visibly greener rather than the yellow shade of the last month, however, the higher temperature has seen an increase in fungal disease in winter crops. This is especially the case in early sown crops that have a high plant population. Grassland has continued to see slurry being applied as conditions improve. Again, fields are beginning to look visibly greener, however, some have been delaying slurry application to get the maximum use of available nutrients.

AYRSHIRE

Dry warm weather in Ayrshire has allowed people to get on with their ploughing and cultivations over the past week. Some have their spring barely sown, and others aren't far away from it. There are also still plenty of fields dunged ready for ploughing. Winter crops are starting to look well with some seeming to show a response to fertiliser put on in the last couple of weeks. Plenty of slurry getting put on grassland, but with cold weather forecast for this week people are holding off getting the fertiliser onto grass until later in the week or into next week when temperatures lift, and little rain is forecast.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

We have had a glorious spell of weather and spring field work is well under way. Many spring crops have been drilled and first fertiliser applications have been applied to grassland. Grass growth in the region has been good with the recent warm weather however some rain would be welcome to help keep growth moving along and wash in the urea that has been recently spread. Winter barely crops have some Rhynchosporium disease present but are generally looking well and greening up after receiving their nitrogen applications.

STRANRAER

The southwest has seen two weeks of dry weather and with that ploughing for spring crops, fertiliser applications on winter crops and slurry and dung applications are well under way. Winter barley and winter wheat crops are looking strong and have responded well to the early Nitrogen. At the moment there appears to be no major issues with disease challenges. Soil temperatures have been rising and some have taken the opportunity to go on early with fertiliser for grassland, whilst some are holding back or not applying any this year because of the cost. Around the countryside it is obvious the fields which have been well limed lately and it is still advisable to use up to date soil samples to base any fertiliser applications on. Slurry and manures are being well used this spring and again analysis can help ensure fertiliser is being matched to crop and soil requirements