

19 October 2023

General Comments

The stormy weather is clearly continuing to present challenges for many. Although reportedly somewhat drier to the west allowing for some late forage cuts to be taken and maize to be harvested, there are, for example, still difficulties in baling up the last of the straw across many regions. Whilst earlier established, better rooted, autumn sown crops are showing more resilience to the heavy rainfall, localised field flooding is however pulling out some areas of those more recently sown crops. Concern also centres around lifting the remaining ware crops and indeed getting wheat in behind. Inevitably some ground is likely to have to revert to spring cropping as a result.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

Farmers in Orkney will look back on the 2023 harvest as having been relatively straight forward. All of the spring sown crops of barley and oats were harvested in good conditions and the vast majority of the straw was baled and stored before it spoiled. Grain yields were good and moisture contents better than normal enabling a welcome saving on propcorn use, however straw was generally less abundant. Although the rainfall has been significant in the last couple of weeks, it has never been at the extreme levels evident further south. Most of the cattle are now indoors as dictated by the ever softening ground and diminishing supply of grass.

CAITHNESS

A definite change in seasonality since our last report. Nearly all spring crop seems to be in the shed now with some pockets of straw still to be secured. Ground is now well saturated though. This has caused potato harvesting to be pretty stop start now. Winter crop continues to look very good having had a great start in the area.

MORAY

A few dry days amongst some deluges of rain, has allowed the last few remaining pockets of spring barley to be harvested with straw being baled straight behind the combine in many cases. That said there still seems to be a fair amount of straw sitting waiting to be baled too. Autumn sown cover crops are coming on and winter oilseed rape crops are about the six to eight leave stage having gotten over pest damage. Winter cereals are beginning to emerge now and are generally looking quite good and range from just emerged to 2-3 leaves. Winter wheat is still getting sown in some areas. Most potato crops have been lifted and grading lines are now in full swing aiming to meet seed export deadlines. Carrot crops are in the process of being strawed down.

INVERNESS

Like the rest of the country the Inverness area saw stormy weather and extremely high rainfall in the past fortnight. Only very localised areas saw river bursting their banks and flooding fields. Most of the damage to crops was from soil erosion during and after the high rainfall. Winter barley and OSR which already have a better canopy and ground cover fared better. Winter wheats, some which were just sown have suffered with seed exposed and small plants struggling or washed away. Time will tell if these crops recover or if some will have to be re-sown. The rain has also meant that some areas planned for wheat are not now being sown. The down pours also saw more cattle taken inside as grass fields have become very wet under foot, with a lot poaching seen in a short time.

ABERDEENSHIRE

Things are getting soggy now!

After a weekend of wet weather, fields are wet which will make it harder for any later crops of winter wheat to get sown and knock any later sown crops of winter barley that are just beginning to emerge. Oilseed rape crops are growing away nicely and autumn fungicide treatments for light leaf spot are beginning to get applied. A lot of potatoes have been lifted, but there are still a lot of fields to be harvested, and the wet weekend will have delayed harvest a bit further. Here's hoping the brighter weather forecast for the week ahead enables folk to finish harvesting the last crops of cereals and tatties alike.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The last couple of weeks has seen opportunities for land work much more limited. While the Buchan area seemed to escape the worst of the damage from the heavy rains, there still remains some straw to be baled up although hopes of getting this tidied up in good condition are diminishing. Most sowing has been done although there are still some fields of wheat being established, mostly after potatoes, with even a couple of dry days in a row being enough for seed drills to appear. Oilseed rape crops continue to grow away well, with some looking particularly bold and forward.

Barley volunteers have been tidied up and the next few weeks will see autumn Light Leaf Spot fungicides applied before sprayers are put away for the winter. Winter barleys and wheat crops have also established well, although growth has started to slow up. The last of the green covers are also being sown to meet EFA obligations. Grain cheques are starting to come in, and while most farmers are seeing some deductions, on the whole prices are good and yields have been better than expected, in some cases even better than last year's bumper crops. Most seed potatoes are lifted, with dressing for export markets having begun although the last of the ware crops remain to be harvested. Cattle are now mostly inside as the rains mean that grass fields quickly get churned up under heavy hooves although the inclement weather brings its own set of challenges in the form of pneumonia.

PERTSHIRE

The last areas of spring barley have been cut within the last week in a good breezy dry spell between two storms. There are still a fair amount of potatoes in the ground and they won't all be lifted before storm Babet arrives. Winter oilseed rape crops are well established and light leaf spot sprays are going on along with graminicides if volunteer cereals are an issue. Winter cereals are still being planted and earlier crops have had autumn herbicide applied but it is getting trickier to get onto later sown fields and many will likely wait until the spring.

FORFAR

There is a frantic rush on this week to get potatoes harvested and wheat drilled before the next storm arrives at the end of the week. The last storm a fortnight ago resulted in excess of 100mm of rain falling over 48 hours with flooding in low lying areas. Coming this early in the season meant that areas of potatoes and vegetables were washed out or flooded. The ground did dry up again fairly quickly after the first storm, but we await to see what the next one brings.

FIFE

After several inches of rain, the stop start nature of this seeding period (and potato harvesting season) has ground to a halt. Potato fields still to harvest are standing in water, for some of those recently harvested fields... they have moved to the north sea! Hopefully newly sown winter cereal fields will drain quickly and allow germination, less than a week should be survivable. Those that have yet to have autumn herbicides will be hoping for a drying wind and no more rain! How soon potato fields can be re-entered will depend on water drainage and soil type.

LOTHIANS

Many farms across the region, except for eastern coastal fringes, experienced in excess of 30mm of rain over a few days early in the month. By the 19th October most areas have accumulated over 50mm for the month to date, and this is before Storm Babet arrives. Soil temperatures are typically currently 7–8 degrees C. (England 10–11 degrees). Earlier sown cereals have emerged evenly, the more forward crops at the 3-leaf stage. Those yet to emerge or just emerging are in well-structured seedbeds and currently free from any slug damage. Despite the earlier heavy rainfall pre-emergence herbicide applications appear to have gone on in good order. Oilseed rape establishment has been rapid and typically even helped by the high soil moisture levels. Some crops are however showing considerable variability in crop growth stages within fields, but the smaller plants do not appear to have been impeded by either, earlier flea beetle activity, or slug damage and should even up as the season progresses. Fodder crops of brassicas and beet continue to bulk up well, although some autumn direct-drilled grasses into stubbles, for example westerwolds ryegrass, have seen variable establishment success depending on location.

BORDERS

There has been 53mm of rain in the last 2 weeks, causing disruption to those drilling cereals, particularly on fields where potatoes have been lifted, or where fields were cultivated awaiting drilling. Most winter wheat has been drilled and is ranging from germination to beginning of tillering. Winter barley is ranging from 3 leaves unfolded to beginning of tillering. Recent colder conditions have reduced slug pressure; however they remain a threat on winter cereals. Oilseed rape crops are ranging from 2 leaf to 7 leaves. Many growers are preparing to spray for light leaf spot/phoma and to tidy up volunteer cereals.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

The weather has been reasonably dry over the past two weeks which has allowed for winter wheats to be drilled in good conditions. Winter barley crops are all up through and looking very well. Some post emergence herbicides have been applied where pre-emergences were missed due to the weather. There has been an unusual amount of grass growth during September and early October which has resulted in some October silage being made. The last of the silage would be made this week to tidy fields up. Winter forage crops have had a great growing season and have yielded very well. Livestock will be soon moving off the grass onto forage crops as the weather starts to change in the next couple of weeks.

STRANRAER

The southwest corner has managed so far to avoid the worst of the autumn storms so we have seen winter barleys and winter wheats establish well. Maize harvest has been underway for the last couple of weeks and following the grain harvest yield trend, will be a mixed bag. There are still some last gasp silage crops being cut and some very strong grass covers where the weather has beaten the opportunity to cut. Forage crops that would have seemed late sown in August have benefited from the September heatwave and a mild Autumn so far so winter fodder for cattle should not be an issue this year. Local straw availability could be a challenge.