

30 March 2023

General Comments

Disease pressure in winter cereals has been favoured by the damp conditions. Septoria is quite visible across all varieties at higher levels for a few years and splashy weather means that even clean looking leaves will likely be infected. Gout fly is present in quite a few crops mainly Borders, Perth and Fife. Light leaf spot levels are higher than last year and sprays are just about due. Winter barley TOs are probably the most pressing task but windy and wet weather makes this tricky.

Regional Comments

KIRKWALL

It's been a very wet winter with rain falling most days since the combining came to an abrupt end in September. Very little ploughing has so far taken place, and the last of the straw was only able to be baled at the start of March. Normally there would be spring barley in the ground by now, so there will be a mad rush when conditions do improve. Newborn lambs will be appearing in fields very soon, but there is no grass for them as greylag geese have eaten all of it.

CAITHNESS

It has been very much the same this period with very little land work being undertaken. Some ploughs have been on the go on lighter soils but following the thaw of snow, ground conditions are not good. That said with longer days and a better forecast ahead, there is a more promising outlook going forward. With no sowing being done yet and a lot of ploughing to get through, there will be pressure on all.

MORAY

Despite the advent of spring winter is still hanging around as this week started off with snow showers and temperatures remain low. A lot of land remains very wet and as such there has been limited activity in terms of spring sowing with just one or two producers making a start on their lighter fields. An estimated 60,000 geese have descended around the Findhorn area and have given winter cereals a hammering but they should recover well enough. Other winter wheat and barley crops are around the stem extension stage with a bit more mildew noticeable on some wheat crops. Winter oilseed rape crops are much taller now than a fortnight ago and are at green

bud stage with a fair bit of light leaf spot present. Where fields are not too wet chemical applications have been applied.

INVERNESS

Continuing cold and wet weather in the Inverness area has not been favourable growing conditions or for completing fieldwork. OSR crops are slowly beginning to grow again after sustaining frost damage. Both Winter Wheat and Winter Barley have reasonably high levels of disease and a TO fungicide application may be required. Fertiliser has been applied to most winter crops now. A very small area of some of the lightest ground has now seen a faltering start to sowing. On the most part ploughing is now very nearly completed and most producers are waiting for warmer temperatures and drier ground conditions to start sowing.

ABERDEENSHIRE

As per the last local comment the view from Aberdeenshire (at time of writing) is white with snow – again! The dusting of snow this morning however is melting fast, but it has been a cold, frosty night, with a blast of cold wind from the north. This cold snap is a break from the wet showery weather that appears to have been common over the last fortnight and looks set to continue this week, albeit a bit warmer, as milder air from the southwest is forecast. Crops however are slowing starting to grow, with winter barley starting to reach growth stage 30, winter wheat tillering and winter oilseed rape flower buds visible from above. Rhynchosporium is still present in winter barley and some crops are getting a TO spray to help keep disease at bay, Septoria can still be seen on winter wheat. More evidence of light leaf spot is beginning to emerge in rape, so robust stem extension sprays will be needed to keep disease levels under control.

BANFF & BUCHAN

The last week has seen an overall improvement in the weather despite it seeming like we can still see all four seasons in a day. Temperatures are still below average however and while land is starting to dry up, winter crop growth is slow. Oilseed rapes however have begun to take off, being in the midst of stem extension with some crops even starting to enter the green bud phase meaning a LLS spray will not be far away. Individual canopies can be quite mixed in terms of development and plants look shorter than normal. The recent cold snap has been hard on winter barley crops, which now look even hungrier than before for both nitrogen and manganese with ground conditions preventing access by sprayers and spreaders. Winter wheats continue their slow development and are starting to get nitrogen. Ploughed land still looks quite raw and not much spring crops will be sown in March this year, in complete contrast to 2022. Ploughing is being finished up and lime spread in the interim. Falling feed barley prices have caused some concern, particularly when compared to the record prices seen a year ago, although malting barley can still be fixed at decent prices for this year's harvest.

KINCARDINESHIRE

A mixed period of weather with cold and at times wet weather, has left the drills in the shed with little or no spring barley having been sown. Ground conditions are still wet and although drying last week, are still in need of a week of good weather. Winter barley is generally looking well in the

area. Crops are tillering and at GS24/25. Crops which only got their first N in the last week are a little yellow and in need of the nutrition. There are signs of Rhynchosporium but mainly on the older leaves. Winter wheat is starting to stretch but is mainly around GS23/24. Crops are beginning to green up but have not liked the cold weather. Oilseed rape is at the welly boot stage or slightly further on and looking well. Pigeons have been a problem in some areas. Grass is starting to green up but still has a bit to do before turnout.

ANGUS

Cold and wet weather has forced many growers to keep the drills in the shed as we wait for warmer soils to sow spring crops in to. However, progress has been made on nitrogen applications, with most winter crops having now received their first nitrogen. Pigeons continue to be challenging in oilseed rape crops and there have been reports of gout fly in cereal crops.

PERTSHIRE

It looks like the continued showery weather is not going to allow much spring barley to be drilled in March with many drills sitting on tractors ready to get going. Winter crops have been receiving nutrition in the form of fertiliser which has been able to progress between showers. Winter cereals are beginning to get going now and with warmer weather forecast these crops should grow rapidly over the next few weeks. Oilseed rape is quite mixed with the most advanced at the green bud stage and getting a light leaf spot fungicide but there are also some crops which the pigeons won't leave alone.

FIFE

All the winter crops have had a growth spurt despite the varied weather. Warm and wet one day to a couple of degrees of frost the next! WOSR is nearing wellie boot height with green buds showing, low levels of light leaf spot can be seen so as soon as fields can support sprayers a fungicide will be applied. Winter wheats are mostly still tillering though the most advanced field (a crop of Bairstowe) is at GS30! Septoria can be found in all wheats viewed. Weed control has mostly been very successful in winter crops this year. Winter barleys are at GS30 and are waiting field conditions suitable to allow TO sprays to be applied. Soil conditions are needing to dry to allow spring cereal seeding and early potato and veg plantings to start. (Some very early sown spring barleys are now starting to emerge.)

STIRLINGSHIRE

Stirlingshire's combinable crops overall are quite clean and have moved very little in the last two weeks due to the cold and wet. They are just needing some heat to get moving. The WW is at the tillering stage and crops are looking mostly clean of disease and there is little pest damage of these crops. Septoria is present generally on the bottom leaves. The WB crops have evened up a bit over the region. Again just needing the heat to get going. They are generally clean but weed burden in some crops is really high. WOSR is now starting to elongate, the crops are quite variable with some still quite patchy due to poorer establishment, wet areas and pigeons. Some crops are quite short where they have been heavily damaged but flower buds are present. There are no spring crops in the ground yet with some ploughing still to do.

LOTHIANS

There has been little respite from the rain over the last fortnight, frustrating many that would have liked to have made a start drilling spring crops. March has seen more than 50mm of rain across the breadth of the Lothians, with the wetter areas seeing more and up to 74mm. Those on heavier soils particularly, have found little or no opportunity yet to follow through on spring herbicide programmes and where no autumn application was made, broad-leaved weed ground cover increases apace; cleavers appear particularly advanced for the time of year. Wheats are varied in growth stage the most forward are moving through GS30 whilst the more backward crops are still tillering. Septoria infection levels are more of a concern this year in some crops and will precipitate a TO application, even in the absence of rust and especially for those where higher fertiliser prices paid ramp up risk exposure to low yields. Disease is evident in winter barleys too as is light leaf spot in rape. The weather forecast remains unsettled and with the inevitable delay in spring cereal establishment it'll be prudent to get the first nitrogen application into/onto the seedbed.

BORDERS

March rainfall to date is 59mm. Ground conditions are wet, with spring barley drilling yet to commence. Oilseed rape is at GS 3:5 (flower buds are raised above the leaves). Light leaf spot can be found on lower leaves. Winter wheat is largely at GS22 –GS23 with some advanced crops at GS30. There are some incidents of Septoria on lower leaves. Winter barley is largely at GS30 with Rhynchosporium present at low levels.

AYRSHIRE

Another couple of weeks of poor wet weather in Ayrshire means that most places aren't any further on than they were previously with their ploughing. Wet ground conditions also mean that fertiliser applications and turn out have been delayed.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

The weather in the southwest has been wet and cold over the past three weeks and as a result there has been very little field activity. Winter crops have had their nitrogen application and are generally looking well. Some advanced crops have a reasonable level of powdery mildew and Rhynchosporium present. Very few spring crops have been drilled but as soon as the weather dries up it will be all go with ploughs and drills. Grass growth has been slow and little nitrogen has been spread due to the wet field conditions.

STRANRAER

A good dry spell at the end of February allowed winter crops to receive fertiliser and fields to be rolled and slurry applied to grassland. March has been extremely wet with the majority of ground at saturation point. Very little spring ploughing has been started and what was done in February is suffering from rain. Although soil temperatures are increasing, continued forecast rain into April will mean that spring sowing will be late. With many dairy farmers in Wigtownshire looking to take 1st cuts at the end April/beginning of May the delays in Nitrogen applications due to ground conditions could set these back 7-10 days.