

AHDB Arable Crop Report

Friday 3 December 2021

Executive summary

The weather was kinder this autumn compared with previous years. Mild, dry and settled conditions for most allowed farmers to focus on planned winter cropping. Clement weather allowed for good spraying and drilling conditions across the whole of the UK. All of this in total has resulted in good crop establishment to the end of November.

A later wheat harvest this summer resulted in some delaying drilling windows. However, those who did delay their drilling were rewarded with favourable conditions. The dry weather continued into November, allowing planned spray applications to be administered.

By the end of November, autumn combinable crop drilling was largely complete. Reports have been received of some growers taking advantage of the AB15/AB1/AB8/AB9 stewardship to take poorer areas of the farm out of production.

There have been a few challenges this autumn though. Some farmers have had issues with glyphosate shortages. In addition, the fuel and haulage challenges have resulted in some delays to deliveries of seed.

Fertiliser

Across the board, farmers are looking to reduce their fertiliser inputs in response to higher costs, with those purchasing their N later in the season looking at prices upwards of £600/t.

There are various ways growers are looking to reduce their inputs. Many are planning a P & K holiday or rate reduction on their cereals crops in 2022. Some are looking to biosolids, digestate and organic manures as alternatives to manufactured N. However, these methods may face issues with the new Farming Rules for Water when applying.

The current high N prices have had a mix of impact across farmers. Some purchased early in the season when prices were released and have plenty in stock. Others have chosen to wait out the market, to see if prices will fall. Equally, a lack of storage on farm has precluded some from buying earlier.

Crop condition

Crop condition was assessed using the USDA approach. This classifies crops into one of five categories (see details below). The values are given as a percentage of the GB crop planted area for that crop, that fall into each of the categories – regional condition scores are available on the [AHDB website](#).

Crop condition definitions:

- Very poor:** Extreme degree of loss to yield potential, complete or near crop failure
- Poor:** Heavy degree of loss to yield potential, which can be caused by excess soil moisture, drought, disease etc.
- Fair:** Less than normal crop condition. Yield loss is a possibility, but the extent is unknown

Good: Yield prospects are normal. Moisture levels are adequate and disease, insect damage and weed pressure are minor

Excellent: Yield prospects are above normal. Crops are experiencing little or no stress. Disease, insect damage and weed pressures are insignificant

The mild, dry and settled autumn has resulted in good crop establishment across the country. Conditions allowed for good drilling and spraying conditions, allowing planned spray applications to be administered.

Crop	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Crops not yet planted or emerged
Winter barley	26%	64%	8%	1%	1%	0%
Winter oats	17%	62%	13%	2%	1%	6%
Winter oilseed rape	22%	56%	15%	3%	3%	0%
Winter wheat	27%	57%	9%	3%	1%	3%

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Wheat

Crop establishment

As at the end of November, 84% of the winter wheat crop was in good-excellent condition. This is versus 57% last season. Only 4% of the crop was stated to be in poor-very poor condition.

Winter wheat drilling was almost complete by the end of November. In September, 27% of winter wheat was drilled, a further 62% in October and 10% in November. The Eastern region has reportedly increased its winter wheat area and the West Midlands is said to have increased the crop area, but will be sowing less spring barley. Crop establishment was very good overall, due to the favourable weather conditions. Indeed, some forward wheats already have 3-4 tillers.

Seed availability has been a challenge for some, with transport issues causing headaches. Some farmers have turned to home saved seed and seed carried over from last year. This has reportedly not established so well, due to poor germination and vigour.

Nutrition

Those farmers who had pre-purchased fertilisers have been applying as normal. However, many across the board are looking to reduce rates due to high input costs. P&K holidays are likely to be a significant feature this growing season. However, those with milling wheat varieties are unlikely to reduce fertiliser use to a significant degree, due to the premiums paid for milling wheat.

Weed pressure

Pre-emergence herbicides have been applied in good time across the UK, and good results have been seen. Currently, low levels of blackgrass are reported. However, some incomplete control of volunteers has been observed, a result of the tight glyphosate situation and the subsequent rate reduction. Therefore, there runs the risk of a green bridge acting as a source of BYDV infection. Within the West Midlands, it is reported that groundsel is an increasing problem.

Pest pressure

Where winter wheat crops have followed oilseed rape (OSR), slugs have been an issue. This has been particularly true for the South West, especially in min/no till systems. In addition, the mild autumn has extended aphid activity, with some using aphicides for BYDV control. In Yorkshire, early sown crops have required two applications of insecticide for aphid control, while Eastern regions only one has been necessary. For late sown crops, slugs have been an issue for some.

Disease pressure

To date, low levels of disease have been seen and no action has been required at this stage. In some of the early sown crops, mildew, septoria and rust have been recorded – notably in the West Midlands.

Winter barley

Crop establishment

As at the end of November, 90% of winter barley was in a good-excellent condition, with only 2% poor-very poor. This is some 32 percentage points up on November 2020, when just 58% of the crop was in good-excellent condition.

Drilling was completed in a timely manner, with 57% planted in September, 43% in October and the final 1% in November. As with winter wheat, settled conditions allowed good progress to be made. Crops are, to date, well established and hybrid varieties are said to be looking very forward. Indeed, 85% of the national crop is now at tillering stage.

Nutrition

As with winter wheat, high input costs are leading many to use a P&K holiday and reduce the N rates being applied.

Weed pressure

Pre-emergence herbicides have been applied in good time due to the clement conditions, and good results have been seen. Indeed, where they have been applied, 95-99% control has been achieved. However in the South East, early drilling has resulted in increased blackgrass issues.

Pest pressure

Slug activity has been recorded in fields that haven't been rolled, particularly in Yorkshire. With weather conditions extending aphid activity, the Eastern region has reported needing two aphicide applications for BYDV control. Again as with wheat, crow damage has been noted on later sown crops.

Disease pressure

Disease pressure is currently low, although mildew and net blotch has been seen in some forward crops.

Oats

Crop establishment

By the end of November, 79% of winter oats were in good-excellent condition, versus 68% the year before. Drilling of the crop is almost complete, with 38% planted in September, 57% in October and 4% in November. Drilling conditions have been excellent and good emergence recorded.

Some regions have reported a reduced area of oats this season.

Nutrition

As with winter wheat and barley, many will be incorporating a P&K holiday this year, due to high input costs. However, N adjustments are likely to be smaller for oats than other cereals crops, due to oats having a lower N requirement. In Yorkshire, manganese has been applied to oats over lighter land.

Weed pressure

As for the other winter cereals crops, pre-emergence herbicides have been applied in favourable conditions and a timely manner, allowing for good control. However, fewer products are licensed for

oats, reducing pre-emergence spray options. Those who drilled later have recorded the help with blackgrass control.

Pest pressure

Few problems have been reported to date and little slug activity has been seen.

Disease pressure

Mildew and rust have been seen in some northern crops, notably in the North East. However, crops in other regions are reported to have low disease pressure.

Oilseed rape

Crop establishment

Oilseed rape (OSR) crops are 78% good-excellent at the end of November, about the same as year earlier conditions (77%). Good establishment has been achieved across many regions, although a small proportion have failed due to the dry September. This has been reported on August sown crops in the East Midlands, and have now been replaced with winter wheat or beans.

During August, 76% of the crop was drilled, the remaining 24% in September. Favourable conditions throughout October and November have allowed for good growth, resulting in crops with fair canopies and leaf cover. In the West Midlands, PGR's (plant growth regulators) might be used where canopies are too large.

Nutrition

Many crops received seedbed nitrogen applications. Now, the large canopies on many of the crops means that the amount of N applied can be reduced. As with other combinable crops, P&K holidays are likely due to high input costs. In the West Midlands, organic manures have been applied to help control Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle (CSFB). However, the new Farming Rules for Water have limited the use of manures or sewage sludge for many.

Weed pressure

Pre-emergence herbicides were applied to dry soils and have yielded good results. The more recent cooler weather has allowed for propyzamide applications to now be started.

Pest pressure

CSFB is still the main pest for OSR. However, healthier crops have been less impacted by early adult damage. In the South West, CSFB numbers are reported higher than normal. However nationally, most plants have got through establishment without too much damage.

In the West Midlands, pigeons are damaging crops, while slug activity is reported in the East Midlands.

Disease pressure

Low levels of disease have been seen and very little phoma has been reported so far.