

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The weather has been largely dry during April, with some frost earlier in the month. The warmer weather experienced over the Easter period saw a growth surge in most regions, all of which were warmer than their respective long-term average.

Rainfall during the month has been well below average for most. This compounded the soil moisture deficit recorded at the end of March, stated as greater than the long-term average for the time of year for most of the country. While farmers are generally happy with the condition of their crops, there are concerns starting around yield impact should the dryness continue and start to cause water stress. In addition, the dry soils are slowing the uptake of nitrogen fertilisers.

However, the dry conditions have meant that drilling of spring crops is almost complete, except for some areas of spring oilseed rape and spring oats.

While generally growers are pleased with grain prices currently, there are worries over the cost of input (fuel and fertiliser) and the erratic supply of some agrochemicals. This has led some to increase their interest in reducing fuel usage, resulting in discussions over reduced tillage methods.

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

	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Crops not yet emerged
Winter Wheat	1%	2%	13%	56%	27%	0%
Winter Barley	1%	2%	15%	61%	23%	0%
Winter Oats	1%	2%	12%	72%	13%	0%
Winter OSR	2%	5%	22%	52%	18%	0%
Spring Wheat	2%	6%	16%	61%	4%	10%
Spring Barley	1%	3%	16%	58%	3%	19%
Spring Oats	1%	3%	17%	57%	1%	20%
Spring OSR	1%	4%	8%	29%	2%	56%

Source: RSK ADAS

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

WHEAT

Crop establishment

Growth stages are variable, depending on location, drilling date and variety. However, warmer temperatures have aided growth and leaf 3 is now typically emerging. The West Midlands have noted that crop appearance has now improved following nitrogen uptake.

Nutrition

The majority of main nitrogen applications have either been applied or are due imminently. Scotland have still to apply their final nitrogen dose. Sulphur deficiency has been seen in some crops that have not received ammonium sulphate applications.

Weed pressure

The spring herbicide applications are reported as working well for broadleaf weed control. The dry weather has also helped inhibit emergence. Blackgrass and wild oats are beginning to show in some wheat crops. Novel approaches to control blackgrass have been seen including cultural control, with inter-row hoeing being used by the occasional grower in an attempt to control rising input costs.

Pest pressure

While pest pressure is generally low, there are sighting of aphids in some regions.

Disease pressure

Septoria is reported, although confined to older leaves. The dry weather has helped reduce the transmission. In addition, later sown crops have a lower risk from Septoria, reducing the need for fungicide inputs in more resistant varieties. There are some reports of yellow rust and powdery mildew. The East Midlands has reported some BYDV in early sown crops not treated with aphicide in the autumn. Dry conditions have allowed farmers to make T0 and T1 applications.

Prospects for the coming months

Prospects currently look hopeful, although most are citing that rain is now needed.

WINTER BARLEY

Crop establishment

The last few weeks has seen good crop growth, with generally good plant and tiller numbers. Early sown crops are thick and require additional PGR application. Hybrid varieties are noted as doing particularly well. In Scotland, forward crops are now at flag emergence.

Nutrition

With the exception of a minority of farms, nitrogen applications are now complete.

Weed pressure

Weed pressure has been kept fairly low for most due to the dry conditions. Wild oat control is now a priority. At harvest, approximately half the seeds are still present on the plants, allowing wild oats to spread further in this crop due to the action of the combine. Some Welsh growers are noting wild oats in abundance.

Pest pressure

Very few pest issues are being reported and low BYDV pressure has been noted to date.

Disease pressure

Timely T1 sprays are providing good protection, but some brown rust has been reported across the regions. Rynchosporium has been seen in some Scottish crops.

Prospects for the coming months

Providing there is some rain, the outlook is fair.

WINTER OATS

Crop establishment

Overall, the crop has been less affected by the dry conditions than wheat and barley, and the plants look well.

Nutrition

Nitrogen applications are largely complete. Some farmers in the East Midlands have opted to reduce nitrogen inputs on their winter oats.

Weed pressure

Good broadleaf control is reported. Blackgrass, bromes, and wild oats have been seen in some plants. There are limited herbicides available for oats. Coupled with resistance issues in some populations, weed control has been a challenge for some.

Pest pressure

No major pest pressure has been reported and incidences of BYDV remain low.

Disease pressure

Some mildew is seen in thicker crops. T1 applications are due to commence shortly.

Prospects for the coming months

If rain arrives, prospects are fair.

WINTER OILSEED RAPE

Crop establishment

Crops range from mid-flowering to pod fill. Most farmers are positive about their winter oilseed rape plant numbers and condition. Crops previously damaged by Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle and pigeons are said to be recovering well.

Nutrition

Fertiliser applications are mostly complete. In the East, some growers have cut back on the total amount of nitrogen this season.

Weed pressure

Herbicide applications were complete by the end of March/early April. Some applications were missed where crop extension occurred rapidly, and charlock and grass weeds remain in the bottom of the crop. While the dense canopies provide some competition, the risk of seed return remains. Contamination of harvested oilseed is a risk where charlock is prevalent. These thick canopies have, however, given good grass weed protection.

Pest pressure

Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle damage is reportedly less this year than recent years in most regions. Most crops are stated to have recovered well from earlier damage. Pigeon grazing has been more noticeable this season. However, crops tended to be well enough established to withstand grazing, recovering quickly with only occasional patches in fields lost. Seed weevil sprays have been applied in the South East.

Disease pressure

Light leaf spot symptoms are still being reported from nearly all regions. Recent warm weather has helped the spread of the disease, with signs of infection visible on the leaf canopy. Farmers are selecting fungicides targeted at sclerotinia, which also have activity against light leaf spot.

The latest AHDB sclerotinia forecast is showing a low risk for nearly all of the UK, due to lack of rain. Occasional crops have received light showers, or heavy dews, and are showing signs of petal stick. Where this is the case, fungicide applications have been recommended.

Prospects for the coming months

Most crops are looking promising.

SPRING WHEAT

Crop establishment

By 27 April, drilling was almost complete (98%), with two thirds of the crop sown in March. Early drilled crops have established well, although those sown into dry seedbeds have been slow to emerge.

Nutrition

Nitrogen has been applied or is waiting for some moisture.

Weed pressure

Good pre-emergence control has kept weed pressure generally low.

Pest pressure

Although low overall to date, some slug activity has been reported. The South West has reported rooks digging up seed in fields where drilling was too shallow.

Disease pressure

Too early to identify any issues.

Prospects for the coming months

Prospects remain dependant on rainfall.

SPRING BARLEY

Crop establishment

Drilling is almost complete at the time of reporting (98%), with 57% of the crop sown in March. Early sown crops have emerged well, although those drilled into dry seedbeds have had patchy emergence.

Nutrition

Nitrogen is currently being applied. Low nitrogen demand crops and the more forward crops have had all their nitrogen. In the West Midlands, manganese deficiency is reportedly a problem for those on dry soils.

Weed pressure

The dry conditions have kept weed pressure low. Most weed control is likely to be post emergence treatments, combined with the T1 fungicide. Some have opted for pre-emergence herbicides for blackgrass control.

Pest pressure

While generally low, some slug activity is reported.

Disease pressure

Some rust has been seen in early sown crops.

Prospects for the coming months

Prospects remain dependant on rainfall.

SPRING OATS

Crop establishment

Drilling is largely complete (99%), with the majority (58%) of crops sown in March. Mixed establishment is reported due to the dry conditions. Small amounts remain to be drilled in Wales, where some reduced cultivation has been recorded for some growers. In the East, there are reports that establishment has not been as good as other spring crops.

Nutrition

Most nitrogen applications have been made to the seedbed, in advance of the crop. Some have opted for a P&K holiday.

Weed pressure

While the dry weather has inhibited weed emergence so far, post emergence herbicides are planned for use by many farmers. However, the need to treat could well be reduced.

Pest pressure

No problems reported to date.

Disease pressure

Some rust in early drilled crops.

Prospects for the coming months

Prospects dependant on rainfall.

SPRING OILSEED RAPE

Crop establishment

Drilling 73% complete, with 67% sown in April. There are some reports of good establishment, but the picture is mixed overall. Many are reporting patchy establishment due

to the dry seedbeds. In the West Midlands, the most advanced crops are at first leaf emergence.

Nutrition

Nitrogen has been applied, but concerns over the dry conditions limiting the amount of nitrogen that will reach the plant roots.

Weed pressure

Some bindweed has been reported, but weed pressure is minimal to date.

Pest pressure

Most regions have reported Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle and pigeon damage, with crops being slow to grow away from the damage.

Disease pressure

Too early to comment.

Prospects for the coming months

Some concerns surrounding Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle damaging prospects.