

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winter weather this season has been relatively benign. January and March recorded cold nights and dry spells. February was a little more unsettled, with wet and windy spells seen across the month.

Herbicide applications over the autumn had good efficacy and current disease pressure is described as “manageable”.

In general, winter crops have established well. Spring planting is now underway for many, the dry March allowing good progress to be made. However, the rising costs of inputs remains a sizeable concern to growers.

FERTILISER

The majority of farmers sourced their 2021/22 requirements in the summer of 2021. Most have sufficient coverage of nitrogen for this season. However, purchases of P and K are lower than normal, with many opting to take a P and K holiday in the face of rising prices and reduced availability. Many are waiting to see what fertiliser prices are doing at the time of final nitrogen application before deciding whether to hold any back for next season.

Given that winter crops were established before the rises in fertiliser prices and the challenging in sourcing, most have not changed their cropping plans this season off the back of high input costs. If changes to cropping plans are made, these will be in June when next season’s crop is planned.

Overall, the current high commodity prices are encouraging farmers to apply fertiliser as planned. However, those growers who purchased the input at over £500/t are reducing application volumes. Some have looked to source slurry and other organic fertilisers to help reduce inorganic fertiliser costs. Yet, the rising cost of fuel will likely increase the transport costs of organic fertiliser. Additionally, rising fuel costs are a real concern, although most are continuing as planned currently.

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

Row Labels	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Crops not yet planted or emerged
Spring barley	0%	1%	4%	0%	0%	95%
Spring oats	0%	1%	3%	0%	0%	95%
Spring oilseed rape	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Spring wheat	0%	5%	10%	0%	0%	86%
Winter barley	19%	61%	19%	1%	0%	0%
Winter oats	11%	67%	20%	1%	1%	0%
Winter oilseed rape	13%	51%	26%	8%	2%	0%
Winter wheat	25%	56%	15%	3%	1%	0%

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

Source: RSK ADAS

WHEAT

Crop establishment

Winter wheat has generally established well, showing good yield potential across the board. As at the end of March, the most forward crops are at growth stage 31 (first node detectable). In the East, early sown (September/October) crops are looking better than those sown later.

Nutrition

The first dose of nitrogen has been applied to all crops, with many regions onto their second dose. In regions where livestock manure is available slurry and manures are in high demand and could lead to strong competition between grassland and arable crops.

Weed pressure

Autumn herbicide applications have largely worked well, reducing the requirements of spring herbicides in some areas. Blackgrass control is generally good in most regions, particularly in the South West where below average infestation in crops is seen.

Pest pressure

Currently, there are no major issues with pests. Gout fly has been seen in some early crops, but no significant impact is anticipated.

Disease pressure

Septoria is present in most regions. Yellow rust is present in some crops, but slow to establish. The consensus is that rust levels are lower than last year.

T0 sprays are being applied in a small proportion of the crops where required. Tebuconazole for rust control is common. Mildew levels are generally low.

Prospects for the coming months

Overall, the condition of the crop is good with few concerns at present.

WINTER BARLEY

Crop establishment

The crop has established well, with the most forward crops at growth stage 31. However in the South West, many crops have been lacking significant growth recently, with many holding in the tillering stage.

Nutrition

First nitrogen applications have been applied. In the East, about 75% of the planned nitrogen has been applied, However in the West Midlands, some farmers have delayed spring nitrogen applications, waiting for a suitable weather window.

Many farmers are opting for a P and K holiday.

Weed pressure

Autumn herbicides have worked well, providing good control in all but the most resistant areas.

Pest pressure

To date, there has been minimal pest pressure. Little evidence of barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) has been seen.

Disease pressure

Mixed levels of disease pressure are reported. Rynchosporium, mildew, net blotch and brown rust are seen in varying amounts across regions. The North East and Wales are reporting a higher incidence of rynchosporium. First fungicides are due to be applied in the East Midlands.

Prospects for the coming months

Crop condition is currently good, with minimal stress placed on it over the winter.

WINTER OATS

Crop establishment

Crops have established and wintered well, with the most forward crops at growth stage 31. In the East, late drilled crops have suffered patchy establishment and seed losses, due to rain at drilling.

Nutrition

The first dose of nitrogen has been applied, although in the West Midlands, forward crops have had little nitrogen applied to stop them becoming too large.

Weed pressure

Blackgrass is the usual problem, but crops are well established and able to compete.

Pest pressure

Very little pest pressure is noted at present.

Disease pressure

Although at manageable levels, mildew is reported in several regions.

Prospects for the coming months

Overall, prospects for the majority of crops are looking good.

OILSEED RAPE

Crop establishment

Most crops have established well, with many moving to yellow bud/early flowering. Some farmers are reporting very large crops, increasing the risk of lodging and making accurate spray applications tricky.

Nutrition

Advanced crops have had all their nitrogen, with second nitrogen and sulphur applications being applied to less developed crops. Those East Midlands farmers who purchased nitrogen at a lower cost (pre autumn 2021) are applying usual amounts. Those who purchased at later, higher, prices are being a little more judicious with application rates.

Weed pressure

Good weed control has been provided from autumn herbicides. Blackgrass and brome is seen in a number of crops. Some farmers are having difficulty in getting hold of herbicides (e.g. Galera) to treat for shepherds' purse.

Pest pressure

While pigeons have been active over the winter months, grazing in many crops, good plant numbers and favourable growing conditions mean most crops have tolerated this well.

Some regions have reported that cabbage stem flea beetle (CSFB) larvae have moved from the leaf petioles into the plant stem. The most vulnerable plants are those which have suffered pigeon damage. The smallest plants are the most affected and may struggle to come back from this. In the South West, CSFB larvae numbers are reported to be lower than last year.

Disease pressure

Light leaf spot has been seen by some growers, but phoma incidence is currently low. Some are spraying for light leaf spot.

Prospects for the coming months

Mixed prospects so far, with much depending on the CSFB infestation. While most crops could do with some rain, there are currently no reports of drought stress.

SPRING WHEAT

Crop establishment

Drilling started in February, although the main period was during March. Thanks to settled spells of weather, good progress has been made. However in the South East, spells of heavy rain in early March meant drilling got underway slightly later than ideal. Nevertheless, warming soil and good seedbeds later in the month enabled a good start to be made.

Nutrition

Some early nitrogen has been applied pre-emergence on the seedbed.

Weed pressure

Pre-emergence herbicides are being used where grass weeds are a problem.

Pest pressure

In the West Midlands and East, crows and slugs are causing some damage to emerging crops.

Disease pressure

Too early to identify any issues.

Prospects for the coming months

Crops have mainly been sown into good seedbeds.

SPRING BARLEY

Crop establishment

February saw the start of drilling, with 8% of the national crop planted during the month. By the end of March, an estimated 70% of national area was in the ground.

Nutrition

Many farmers are applying up to 50% nitrogen directly into the seedbed. Where possible, manures are being used.

Weed pressure

Pre-emergence herbicides are being applied to control grass weeds.

Pest pressure

So far, very few problems are reported. Crow damage is affecting emergence in a small proportion of the crop, where birds are eating the seed as it germinates.

Disease pressure

No problems reported to date.

Prospects for the coming months

Prospects look good, with the crop drilled under good conditions.

SPRING OATS

Crop establishment

Small areas were planted in February, with most drilling occurring in March. By the end of the month, almost 60% of the intended area had been planted.

Nutrition

Some farmers are applying nitrogen pre-emergence at drilling, at 40-60kg/N/ha.

Weed pressure

Few herbicide options, but limited number of issues reported so far.

Pest pressure

No problems reported to date.

Disease pressure

No problems reported to date.

SPRING OILSEED RAPE

Crop establishment

Very little drilled to date.