

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This has been one of the best recent years for spring drilling; drilling of spring wheat, barley, and oats was completed during March and April. Challenges have been noted with spring oilseed rape drilling, and areas not yet planted are likely to be switched to other crops.

Overall disease pressure for all crops remains low. However, the dry conditions are beginning to affect crop development.

Some spring barley and spring oat crops also needed to be re-drilled in some areas. Meanwhile, winter oilseed rape has been replaced with spring linseed in some areas of severe pigeon damage.

From March to early April, conditions were dry, with UK average rainfall below the long-term average. Eastern England had just 6mm of rain in March, making it extremely dry.

By mid-April, rainfall returned although there were substantial regional differences with the South West experiencing higher levels, while the West Midlands saw comparatively little.

Prior to the mid-April rainfall crop growth had stalled. However, since the rain, crops that received rain have begun to develop. Some winter barley is now well ahead of its usual growth stage.

In the West Midlands, where following 10–20 mm of rainfall, nitrogen is now being taken up and crops are showing signs of recovery.

In the far north of North East England, conditions remain very dry with no recent rainfall and crops are showing signs of stress. In the East Midlands, barley has been irrigated where water resources are available. Parts of Scotland also received less than 10mm in April.

Meanwhile Northern Ireland has had a favourable spring so far, with approximately 60mm of rainfall recorded in the past 10 days.

It's also worth noting that the withdrawal of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in England to new applicants has led to an increase in the retention of very poor crops. These crops would otherwise have been taken out of production and the land entered into the scheme.

The information in this report was captured up to Monday 28 April 2025 for AHDB by RSK ADAS Ltd.

CROP CONDITION AND GROWTH STAGES

Crop Condition ratings have been undertaken using the USDA methodology. The national (GB) scores are provided here, with regional ratings 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.

GB crop condition ratings

	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Crops not yet planted or emerged
Winter wheat	2%	6%	32%	53%	7%	0%
Winter barley	1%	5%	27%	59%	8%	0%
Winter oats	0%	4%	24%	64%	8%	0%
Winter OSR	3%	7%	31%	48%	12%	0%
Spring wheat	0%	1%	31%	56%	11%	1%
Spring barley	1%	2%	22%	57%	17%	1%
Spring oats	0%	3%	26%	57%	12%	2%

Data on GB crop conditions captured up to Monday 28 April 2025.

Source: AHDB, data captured by RSK ADAS Ltd

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

WINTER WHEAT

Crop development

At the end of April, 60% of the GB winter wheat crop is in excellent or good condition. This is down from 67% at the end of March but still well above the 45% reported a year ago (end-April 2024). But the proportion in excellent or good condition is still below the 88% recorded in April 2023 and 83% in April 2022.

Growth stages typically range between GS31 and GS32.

Nutrition

A lot of nitrogen fertiliser has now been applied. In the East Midlands, nitrogen applications began early, with all fertiliser applied by the end of March.

With recent rainfall and warmer weather forecast, substantial crop growth is expected. For example, in the South East, plant growth regulators (PGRs) are being used on crops with a history of chicken manure applications even though crops are short.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Dry conditions are reducing herbicide efficacy, making weed control more difficult. As the dry spell persists, weeds are becoming increasingly resilient.

Spring-germinating black-grass is appearing in winter crops that were rolled this spring.

In the West Midlands, groundsel is proving difficult to control in dry conditions due to its waxy surface and lack of competition from crops growth. In the North East, ryegrass had been effectively managed with cinmethylin until the onset of dry conditions.

A few isolated cases of ryegrass are also present in Northern Ireland. One confirmed case of resistance to SU chemistry has been reported in annual meadow grass in Northern Ireland, which had previously been controlled with iodosulfuron-methyl-sodium.

Gout fly has caused significant damage, with many tillers lost. In some cases, entire plants have been lost. In Eastern England, winter wheat is looking thin where gout fly has caused tillers to die back. Most T1 fungicide applications have been completed on wheat.

Recent dry weather will have reduced septoria pressure. But there are multiple reports of yellow rust becoming more frequent. Plus, a general increase in disease levels is expected following recent rainfall.

In the West Midlands, yellow rust and mildew are present but remain under control.

Yellow rust has been the primary concern in the East Midlands, especially where T0 sprays were missed. Damage is most obvious on the previously resistant varieties Champion, Typhoon, and Beowulf.

Within the North East of England and Yorkshire, unexpected outbreaks of yellow rust have occurred in Typhoon and Dawsum varieties. Yellow rust has been more severe around Sunderland, emerging just as T0 sprays were being applied—those who timed applications well saw good control.

Yellow rust is present in Northern Ireland as well but has been effectively managed with well-timed fungicide applications.

In Scotland, yellow rust has been noted even on varieties typically considered resistant.

Prospects

Winter wheat crops are picking up in regions that had rainfall. Overall pest and disease pressure is low with the exception of yellow rust where T0 fungicides were not applied.

WINTER BARLEY

Crop development

Winter barley is developing rapidly, with flag leaves emerging when plants are still only around two feet tall. Growth stages typically range from GS33 to GS37.

An estimated 68% of winter barley crops are in good to excellent condition at the end of April, down slightly from 70% last month and notably below April 2023's 90%. However, the rating is still well above the 56% a year ago.

Nutrition

The rapid development is creating challenges around the timing and use of plant growth regulators (PGRs).

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Like for winter wheat, herbicide efficacy in winter barley has been reduced due to the ongoing dry conditions.

There have been a few reports of aphid presence in crops in the South East of England, though populations remain low.

In Yorkshire, free living nematode (FLN) issues in barley have been exacerbated by the dry conditions, with symptoms appearing more pronounced than usual.

However, in terms of disease pressure, winter barley crops remain very clean.

Prospects

Six-row barley varieties are performing well, showing no signs of disease or stress. In contrast, two-row varieties are struggling, affected by gout fly and a lack of vigour, which may ultimately impact on their yields.

WINTER OATS

Crop development

At the end of April, 72% of winter oats were in good to excellent condition, down only one percentage point from the end of March. It is also still well above last year's 53%. While the proportion in good or excellent condition is below April 2022's 85% or March 2023's 81%, it's by a smaller margin than other winter cereals.

Growth stages are typically between GS31 and GS32.

However, in the North East, some crops are lagging behind and showing signs of stress.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Winter oat crops remain very clean where black-grass is not an issue. Little disease and little to no pest problems reported.

In the East Midlands, black-grass heads are now emerging, and decisions are being made regarding whether to spray off affected areas.

Prospects

No major issues are recorded for most winter oats. However, following the withdrawal of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), some poorly performing crops have been retained, which were planned for removal and placing into the scheme. Many of these crops are currently stagnant, and some areas are being sprayed off due to blackgrass.

WINTER OILSEED RAPE

Crop development

Winter oilseed rape (WOSR) is the only one of the winter crops reported on, where the overall condition score has improved from last month. Overall, 59% of WOSR is in a good to excellent condition at the end of April, up slightly from 57% at end-March. This is also notably above the 47% seen at this point last year, but below the levels seen in April 2022 (70%) and April 2023 (66%).

Most crops have now reached the yellow bud stage and are starting to flower, with the most advanced already at mid-flowering.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Overall, crops are in very good condition, with minimal ongoing flea beetle damage reported. However, feeding by deer and pigeons have caused damage in parts of fields, with bird damage this year being more severe than previously seen in many areas.

In the West Midlands, small numbers of mealy cabbage aphids are beginning to appear around field headlands. Some crop loss has also occurred due to pigeon grazing.

Spraying for sclerotinia is currently underway in the North East of England as a preventative measure ahead of petal fall, rather than due to active infection.

Light leaf spot continues to be reported in crops across the country.

Prospects

Oilseed rape crop condition is variable, but in general crops look very good in the absence of feeding damage.

SPRING WHEAT

Crop development

Drilling was completed in April, but dry weather has resulted in slow early development. Most growth stages currently range between GS20 and GS29.

With an estimated 1% of crops yet to emerge, 67% of spring wheat is rated in good or excellent condition. Comparisons to previous years are not meaningful due to the larger areas that were yet to be planted or emerge.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

As with spring barley and oats, pre-emergence herbicides have had limited efficacy.

SPRING BARLEY

Crop development

Dry conditions are beginning to impact crop development. Many spring barley crops emerged yellow and stressed, largely due to being drilled too deep — an issue linked to good seedbed conditions encouraging deeper placement.

Across the UK, most growth stages currently range between GS12 and GS29.

In the North East of England, Yorkshire and East Midlands, most crops are currently at GS12 to GS26 as dry weather has slowed early development.

In Northern Ireland, most spring drilling took place in the last week of March, which is earlier than usual for the country.

While an estimated 1% of crops are still to emerge, 74% of crops were in good or excellent condition at the end of April. Comparisons to previous years are not meaningful due to the larger areas that were yet to be planted or emerge.

Nutrition

Many farmers are front-loading Nitrogen fertiliser applications, something particularly noted in the East Midlands.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Herbicide applications have already been made. Conditions have been too dry to justify using cinmethylin in spring barley, as its high cost cannot be justified if ineffective. As a result, pinoxaden is now being used instead.

SPRING OATS

Spring oats are growing well. Most crops (73%) are tillering though there a few crops at GS30 and GS31. At the end of April, just 2% of crops were yet to emerge, the smallest proportion in recent years, with 69% of crops in good or excellent condition.

However, there's been limited success of pre-emergence herbicides due to the dry weather, so this may need to be monitored going forward.

SPRING OILSEED RAPE

Most of the crop has only recently emerged, and there remains a notable proportion of crops still to be planted or emerge.

There are reports of farmers substituting spring oilseed rape with spring linseed, and remaining unplanted areas are likely to be replaced with alternative spring crops.