

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winter crops are now growing well in most regions, and most are far stronger than last month. However, farming conditions have remained more problematic in the central and Northern parts of England, than Southern England, and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This is reflected in the local crop condition ratings which have, in some cases, not improved from last month.

Overall, nature has an impressive way of catching up with the seasons. Most winter crops are at the expected growth stages for the time of year despite their extremely poor start, and spring crops generally look well.

There have still been difficulties getting onto land to spray during May and some farmers are still behind; others skipped or simply missed certain applications. The weather has been catchy and finding windows of opportunity has been a challenge for many growers, especially those with heavy, wet soils. However, the light showers have favoured growth for most crops.

Spring crop condition is mostly good or excellent, which eases some pressures of the previous month of getting spring crops drilled. Nevertheless, drilling delays may have affected yield potential, and some regions did not manage to complete drilling, so the fallow area will be high this year.

We will learn at harvest how well crops recovered from periods of persistent environmental stress. We have been able to assess the crop survival rate but cannot yet tell the yield they are building. Leafy crops do not necessarily translate into high yields.

Spring rain has been useful and allowed ample growth, tillering and nutrient uptake to enable crops to regain their strength and growth stage, appropriate to the time of year.

Overall, no records are expected to be broken this year. Most spring planting was late, but plants are catching up remarkably. Yields will probably be affected by the poor timings of applications.

The information in this report was captured up to Wednesday 05 June 2024 for AHDB by The Andersons Centre.

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
Winter Wheat	6%	12%	28%	37%	18%
Winter Barley	5%	12%	21%	44%	18%
Winter Oats	8%	14%	26%	38%	15%
Winter OSR	8%	13%	30%	38%	11%
Spring Wheat	1%	15%	25%	52%	7%
Spring Barley	3%	10%	31%	43%	12%
Spring Oats	0%	8%	18%	62%	11%
Spring OSR	1%	6%	26%	62%	5%

Source: The Andersons Centre

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

WHEAT

Overall

Nationally, the wheat crop is described as average for most, although, there are pockets where the crop is good or even excellent. Overall, winter wheat is looking considerably better than last month. 55% of GB winter wheat is rated as in good or excellent condition, up from 45% a month ago, though still below last year's 85%.

For spring wheat, 59% of crops across GB are in good or excellent condition, compared to 77% last year. A month ago, most spring wheat had yet to be planted or emerge.

Agronomists have been astonished by the level of canopy expansion since growing conditions improved. Mother Nature has played catch up, but it is not yet clear whether she has brought yields along with the leafy growth. However, where ears have emerged, ear size and site numbers look promising.

Crop Development

Most winter wheat is at a growth stage of around 52/53, although cooler conditions at the end of the month slowed down ear emergence. The UK has had some warm days but even then, most are being followed with cold nights.

Spring wheat has been the slowest of the crops to catch up with its lost ground and might yet be a little late into harvest.

Nutrition

There is a distinction between those crops that had appropriately timed nitrogen applied and those that did not. Those that did are now looking respectable and have caught up with the growth stages we would expect at this time of year.

The last nitrogen application was quickly taken up by the crop thanks to the damp conditions. This, coupled with lower-than-normal expected yields, suggests there could be some crops with impressive protein levels, which could be very useful for flour mills this year (depending on other quality parameters).

Nitrogen applications are all complete now. Foliar nutrition has been the focus of many throughout the season to try and help crops as best they can, being mindful of conditions and rooting but also balancing cost with output potential. However, it seems to have worked with significant improvements in crop condition. Magnesium applications with T2 and T3 will be going on now or shortly.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Reports from all regions describe how disease pressures have been mounting, mainly septoria with the wet weather conditions. The dry conditions have not been lengthy enough to get on top of the disease properly for many.

Septoria on leaves 2 and 3 is common and present on leaf 4 on some plants, especially where early fungicide timings were compromised or not applied due to the wet weather conditions. It is occurring on the flag leaf in some areas and even good programmes have not held disease on some varieties, especially those drilled early. Yellow rust in the North East has been successfully controlled at T1, however the more susceptible varieties seem to seem to have been affected this year. Brown and yellow rust are visible in susceptible varieties for both early and later drilled fields, although most people have been getting on top of it with T2 spraying. Barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) is showing in early sown crops, which is minor but starting to show.

T3s are expected to go on in the next 10 days in the south.

In a bid to reduce the spend on poor crops, and save time too, some have not sprayed full rates or missed applications completely, and this is where the issues are seen more frequently. Some suggest it is necessary to do the opposite to control septoria, rusts and ear diseases in the light of the poor conditions we have had. In the South East there are reports of gout fly eggs on spring wheat, which could become an issue, although these have been treated and will be again.

With milling premiums currently as high as they are, bread wheat growers will be focussing on managing fusarium particularly well this year.

Grass weed control has been poor this year with autumn herbicide applications missed or ineffective. Blackgrass is obvious in many fields where this has been the case. There will be a few areas being sprayed off prior to harvest in extreme cases, with some already completed to avoid seed shed. Bromes and ryegrass are also an issue for many, again due to the lack of autumn chemistry efficacy and application delays in April. Some fields in the East Midlands have wild oats where they have never been before.

Broadleaf weed control is better than that for grass weeds, although a common theme is groundsel which seems to be the challenging one. Late emerging broadleaf weeds are now poking through crop canopies, with the wet spring and early summer promoting growth. Some late tidying up of patches, such as cleavers, will have been necessary.

Beyond the comments above, winter crops are looking as expected and there are no serious weed pests or diseases present.

In spring wheat there are not really any pests of significance. Some weeds are starting to emerge but they are small and manageable. Disease is not yet present but expected.

Prospects

Thankfully, the spring remained damp, suiting the short-rooted crops. Dry conditions may have throttled the already weak crops, but instead, the receptive soil conditions have built strong plants from stragglers.

In Wales, wheat crops are more forward than in an average year and a possible slightly early harvest could be seen. Crops in Scotland have caught up and are looking good overall.

Remaining yield potential will now be determined by the sunshine throughout June and early July. Dry, warm sunshine from now on would make a large difference to the prospects of this weather damaged wheat crop. Some farmers now simply want this crop done to start again in the autumn, while others are encouraged by the crop's improvement in the last month.

WINTER BARLEY

Overall

Winter barley is looking surprisingly good. It has caught up with the stage of development expected at this time of year. Many crops have tillered well to fill some of the gaps that emerged in winter. Unfortunately, some grass weeds have done the same.

Winter barley is a tale of two halves. On the better land with more free draining soils, it is similar to wheat in that it has recovered remarkably well. Many of these crops look strong, although barley can be deceiving when it's in head with awns waving in the wind. On the heavier soils and those areas that were waterlogged until early spring, winter barley crops are average to poor. They have low tiller numbers and so although they have caught up, we suspect yield potential will be low.

Across GB, 62% of winter barley is now rated as in a good or excellent condition. This is up from 56% at the end of April, but below the 88% at the end of May 2023.

Nutrition

Winter barley nutrition is now complete and the last critical input required is sunshine. As with wheat, the crop is now more or less back to where we would expect it to be at this time of year, albeit with a few gaps in some fields.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

There is reasonably high disease pressure with Net Blotch and Rhynchosporium being quite prolific in the North of England and into Scotland. Net Blotch and Ramularia are also the main threats in winter barley further south. There are no pests of significance reported beyond a few BYDV problems where it was too wet to spray.

Grass weeds are prevalent in poor crops and some of the poorest areas will be sprayed off prior to harvest. In the North of England, weeds are generally under control with a few grass weeds present that were not sprayed in the autumn. In the Midlands, blackgrass control is generally poor.

Winter barley spray programmes are now complete. The last threat from the weather could be late thunderstorms on better crops.

Prospects

Prospects for winter barley are average on the whole for the national crop but promising for some individuals where conditions have favoured the crop.

OATS

Overall

Oats are looking good considering the conditions most were planted into, the majority (proportionally even, more than usual) being spring oats. Spring oats have grown quickly and boldly to give strong plants in most cases, even those planted as late as the end of April. Indeed, some of these very late drilled crops have encouraging yield potential and have been remarkably cheap to grow.

Across GB, 53% of winter oats are now rated as in a good or excellent condition, broadly in line with the rating at the end of April but still below last year's 80%. However, 73% of spring oats are currently rated as good or excellent, in line with the national (GB) rating at the end of May 2023.

Nutrition

All applications are now complete. Oats are a low input crop, and a scavenger too, so they have not suffered so badly from late applications of fertiliser and foliar feeds as other crops have done.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

Oats are relatively disease free at the moment, in some regions there is some mildew pressure but nothing too concerning or surprising, considering the conditions the spring crop established into. Some crown rust has been identified in the North of England, the West Midlands and South East but nothing significant. Sprays will be going on now to tidy that up.

Grass weeds are showing in places, but grass weed herbicide options are not available for winter oats. There are very limited pre-emergent applications for all weed control in spring oats too. So, there is an element of acceptance in the crop anyway and field choice is critical.

Broadleaf weed control is complete on most farms. In spring oats, the usual broadleaf weeds are cleavers, fat hen and groundsel.

Prospects

Spring oats are looking remarkably strong throughout England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. It is a resilient crop and clean. With spring oats making up a larger than usual proportion, it is possible the prospects for oats are the best of the combinable crops.

OILSEED RAPE

Overall

The plants that survived, in many cases, have flourished in the space left from those that did not make it through winter. However, this still leaves gappy fields in some regions, particularly Midlands where the worst weather and heavy soil combination appeared to be.

The crop has amazed many in how well it has branched and podded in the last month from very weak beginnings. Seed size is possibly the most critical bit now for yield.

Across GB, 49% of winter oilseed rape is rated as in a good or excellent condition, slightly up from 47% at the end of April but still below last year's 63%. 67% of spring oilseed rape is rated as good or excellent.

Nutrition

This is now complete. Only warmth and sunshine remain a necessity.

Poor weather hampered timings of applications as we have reported all season. Many growers cut back on inputs where output potential was low, particularly where larvae infestations have held back crops.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

There has been very variable control of grass weeds because in some areas the plant population is not complete. This leaves patches of bare ground, allowing both grass and broadleaf weeds to establish. Generally though, weed control has been good.

A small amount of seed weevil is present, so for pests and diseases it is considered that the crop will be ok. The winter gave conditions of extreme slug and flea beetle damage, but those are now passed.

Prospects

In the warmer and drier regions, such as the South East, there is good potential for the crop, which has podded well. Sun is now needed to fill them.

Overall, though oilseed rape crops are likely to have limited yield potential this year for many growers. Yields are therefore expected to be poor, even in the areas without patches. There are some growers already planning not to grow oilseed rape again next year. Others may be pleasantly surprised.

Whilst spring oilseed rape may have increased in area this year as a result of failed winter oilseed rape fields, the area remains very small and of limited significance.

SPRING BARLEY

Overall

Some spring crops, barley included, are still a week or more behind where they would normally be at this time of year. But this might be expected, having been planted a month late in some cases. Nevertheless, despite their delay, crops are racing through their growth stages and look healthy and strong. They may yet catch up with their 'normal' growth stage completely by next month.

A few areas of spring barley on heavier soils of the Midlands are thin and behind. In Scotland, the crop is looking stronger and healthier by the day and has largely caught up with the stage of development expected at this time of year.

Overall, 55% of GB spring barley is rated as in a good or excellent condition, compared to 73% at the end of May 2023. A month ago, nearly half of spring barley crops had yet to be planted or emerge.

Nutrition

Spring barley has completed its tillering stage, so the stem count is now set.

The rate of crop growth has taken many agronomists by surprise, with the plants racing through their growth stages. This has put pressure on their management, and plant growth regulators have been used fully in most cases.

All fertiliser applications will be complete; many were all applied ahead of sowing for those late drilling. This was in an attempt to protect against a dry spell following sowing. But clearly the weather has actually been helpful for spring crops, with rainfall getting them up and away quickly.

Pest, weed and disease pressures

No serious diseases have emerged, but there have been a few leatherjacket issues. There are a few signs of Rhynchosporium in some fields, which may need attention.

Some weeds are emerging and being sprayed, while other growers will apply herbicides in early June.

Prospects

On the whole, prospects are encouraging. Given the late drilling date and variable seed bed conditions, most growers are pleasantly surprised with how well spring barley crops are developing. They have come up quickly and kept growing with warm wet conditions being on their side. Some forward crops look very thick and in danger of lodging. Despite the late start, achieving an average yield is now a possibility.

OTHER POINTS

The last of the maize seed is now more or less planted.