

NOTE

This is the fourth harvest report of the 2023/24 season and covers the beginning of harvest up to 29 August 2023. It is produced with data collected by RSK ADAS Ltd and compiled by AHDB. The approach used is consistent with previous years allowing comparison of data and provides a snapshot of harvest progress throughout the harvest season. All harvest reports run from Wednesday to Tuesday – with data reported for the week ending on a Tuesday.

Harvest progress data is available for all crops in all regions. The reported ranges within the text reflect and represent the observed on-farm variability in crops.

Grain and seed yields from early harvested crops are adjusted to a moisture content of 14.5% for cereals and 8% for oilseed rape.

OVERVIEW

Weather conditions have been variable across the UK with a mixture of dry, sunny spells and rain showers. An average air temperature of 15.3°C was recorded during the week ending 29th August, which is slightly below the long-term average. Across the UK, the average rainfall for the week ending 29th August was 12.4 mm. This is about on par with the long-term average, although South East England, Wales, and Scotland have experienced above-average rainfall.

Periods of dry weather have provided good windows of opportunity for harvesting.

By 29 August 89% of the total winter wheat area had been harvested, up from 37% complete a fortnight earlier. Progress is now above the five-year (2018-2022) average of 82% complete by this stage in the season.

Harvesting of winter barley is complete and winter oilseed rape is all but complete, putting both on par with the five-year averages of 100% and 99% respectively. Only a very few fields of oilseed rape remain in the North East.

The **oat harvest is 80% complete**, which is also ahead of the five-year average of 69%. Meanwhile, **harvesting of spring barley is 59% complete**, marginally behind the five-year average of 63%.

There is some variability in straw yields, with good yields generally reported in Eastern England, the East Midlands, and Scotland, but lower straw yields in the North West. There have been some difficulties drying and baling spring cereal straw in particular. While it varies by region, overall, more straw is being chopped to try and avoid delays in cultivations. Rainfall has delayed cultivations in the Eastern region due to difficulties moving swathes of wet straw.

There have been reports of grain sprouting in the ears of crops, particularly those which have lodged and have had contact with soil. However, the overall rate of sprouting remains low.

WHEAT

WINTER WHEAT

Harvest update

Harvest progress data covers all regions for winter wheat. Drier weather has enabled the winter wheat harvest to progress well over the last two weeks, and the harvest is now 89% complete. This is up from 37% a fortnight earlier (15 August) and is now ahead of the five-year average.

Strong progress has been made in many regions. As such, harvest is now in the closing stages in the North West (96% complete), South West (94%), East Midlands (94%) and West Midlands (93%). The Eastern, South East, and Yorkshire & the Humber are not far behind. Progress is a little further behind in the North East (82% cut) but still well advanced.

The largest proportions remain to be harvested in Wales, where harvest is 53% complete, and Scotland, where 59% has been cut by 29 August.

Rain, plus heavy dews in some areas, mean drying continues to be required.

Sooty mould has been present in some crops, but the overall incidence rate has been relatively low despite wet conditions. No mycotoxin problems have been reported so far. Ergot has been seen in some loads in the East Midlands, but no rejections have been reported so far.

Yields

Regional yield indications are good, though on-farm reports over the most recent week range from 5.0 t/ha to 13.0 t/ha. As with previous reports, higher yields have generally been achieved on heavier land compared to crops on lighter soils that experienced water stress.

Above-average yields are reported for the South West, East Midlands, Eastern region, and North West in the week ending 29 August. In Scotland, yields were close to average.

As of 29 August, the average GB winter wheat yield for all crops harvested to date is estimated at 7.8 - 8.2 t/ha, which is currently sitting around the five-year average.

Quality

Good harvest progress means more insight is now available, but this information could still change as harvest progresses and test results come through.

Specific weights –The GB average is currently 73 – 75 kg/hl, down slightly from our last report (74 – 76kg/hl). Generally, specific weights are reported as average or acceptable in the Midlands, North East, and Yorkshire & The Humber. However, they are slightly lower than average in Eastern England, and on the low side in the South West, with most crops only just meeting specification.

Hagberg falling number (HFN) – Typical HFN are ranging between 220 – 250 nationally, down from 260 – 300 in the last report. There is also regional variation with HFNs said to be holding up well in Eastern England and West Midlands, and acceptable in the East Midlands. However, HFNs are beginning to decline in the South of England. Low HFNs are the main issue for milling wheat in Yorkshire.

Protein – Typical national protein ranges from 12.5 – 13.0%, unchanged from the last report. In regions where insight is available, protein levels are generally acceptable or high, though lower levels are expected in Scotland due to high nitrogen fertiliser prices last year.

Moisture – The GB average is 15 – 16%. All regions reported average grain moisture of between 15 – 16% for the week ending Tuesday 29th August, except for the North East which reported 17%.

Rain and heavy dews in some areas meant drying continued to be needed. Around 30% of grain in the North East and Yorkshire, and 60% in the South West needed drying. In Scotland, around half of the grain has been dried. In Wales, harvested moisture is averaging at 16%.

BARLEY

WINTER BARLEY

Harvest update

Harvest is now complete in all regions. Most regions finished harvesting in the week ending 15 August, with the remaining areas in Scotland wrapped by 22 August. The final crops in Yorkshire were cut in the week ending 29 August.

Yields

Average weekly yield indications were good, ranging between 6.2 to 9.0 t/ha. Crops on heavier land typically achieved slightly higher yields than those to lighter soils which suffered from water stress.

The typical GB average yield for all winter barley to 15 August 2023 is estimated between 6.8 – 7.2 t/ha, sitting around the five-year average.

Quality

Specific weights – Specific weights have varied by region, ranging from 58 – 64 kg/hl on farm. The GB typical average is currently 62 – 65 kg/hl.

Screenings – Screenings are low, typically between 2–5%.

Grain nitrogen (malting varieties) – The GB average grain nitrogen indications range between 1.5 – 1.7%.

Germination (malting varieties) – The GB average germination rate is reported as 96 – 98%.

Moisture – The GB average moisture content is 15 – 16%.

SPRING BARLEY

Harvest update

Harvest progress data covers all regions for spring barley, though there are limited harvest insights for Scotland and Wales. By 29 August 59% of the total harvest had been completed, marginally behind the five-year average of 63%.

Eastern England, the South West, and West Midlands are furthest ahead proportionally. The areas with most crops proportionally still to be cut are the North East of England, where harvesting is 36% complete, and Scotland, where 21% has been harvested.

In the South East malting crops are being targeted for earliest cutting as far as possible. Delays mean some fields are getting greener as weeds and secondary tillers continue to grow, prompting late glyphosate where it is an option.

Yields

On farm, regional yields over the week range between 4.5 – 9.0 t/ha. There is variation in yields depending on varieties, sowing date, and soil type. Crops grown on heavier land have performed slightly better, as have earlier sown crops in general.

The current GB typical average for all crops harvested to date is 5.5 – 5.9 t/ha, slightly improving from report three (data to 15 August). This is in the region of the previous GB five-year average of 5.8 t/ha.

Quality

More insight is becoming available as harvest progresses. But progress is still behind recent years, so the volume of processed samples is still lower. As a result, quality reports could change once more crops are analysed.

There have not been any reports of any mycotoxin issues.

Specific weights – Specific weights for crops harvested so far are reportedly variable. In the East Midlands specific weights are generally 60 – 67 kg/hl, while acceptable specific weights are reported in the South West. Meanwhile, specific weights are generally reported at 58 – 65 kg/hl in the North East and 59 – 64 kg/hl in Yorkshire & The Humber. In the West Midlands, specific weights are typically 57 – 67 kg/hl in the West Midlands, but likely to worsen for the crops remaining to be cut. Lower than average specific weights are reported for Eastern England, with late-sown crops being the worst-performing.

The GB average is currently 62 – 64 kg/hl.

Screenings – The GB average for screenings is reported to be between 3 – 5%, up slightly from the previous report (2 – 5%).

Grain nitrogen (malting varieties) – The majority of crops are reported to have acceptable nitrogen contents. In the Eastern region, crops are said to be meeting specification, while in the South West, malting varieties are so far reported to have an average N content of 1.5%. Higher nitrogen contents have been reported in Yorkshire & The Humber, particularly for late-sown crops that have lower yields.

GB average grain nitrogen indications range between 1.5 – 1.6%, down from 1.5 – 1.7% in the previous report.

Germination (malting varieties) – The situation varies amongst the regions for which we have insights. In the Eastern region, germination levels are reported at 98%, and most crops in the East Midlands passing (98% germination). However, the picture is less favourable in Yorkshire & The Humber where germination levels have been affected by the wet weather prior to harvest. Rates of 90 – 97% are said to be common in Yorkshire and a

major reason for malting rejections. In the West Midlands, quite a few crops are reported to have failed germination tests, with 96 – 98% germination common.

The GB average germination rate is reported as 96 – 98%.

Moisture – The GB average moisture content is currently 14 – 17%.

OATS

Harvest update

Oat harvests have progressed well over the last two weeks, with 80% of the crop now harvested. The oat harvest is almost complete in Eastern England (97% complete), but least advanced in Yorkshire & The Humber (43% complete) and the East Midlands (60% complete).

In Yorkshire & The Humber, winter oat harvesting is complete, but there are still many fields of spring oats remaining to be harvested. In the East Midlands, most winter oats have been harvested but there are reports of straw still being green and damp.

In Scotland, 80% of the oat area has been cleared.

Yields

Regional on-farm yields generally ranged between 5.0 to 9.0 t/ha for winter oats, and 3.7 to 7.0 t/ha for spring oats. As for other crops, sowing date and soil type are key influences.

The GB average yield estimate for winter and spring oats harvested by 29 August is currently 4.9 – 5.5 t/ha. This is up slightly from the previous report and close to the 2018 – 2022 average of 5.4 t/ha.

Quality

Specific weights – Specific weights are generally reported to be acceptable, albeit variable. Regional specific weight reports range from 42 – 58 kg/hl. Spring oats have tended to have lower specific weights compared to winter oats, and in the Eastern region late-sown spring oats are the poorest performing.

Specific weights are reported at 51 – 53 kg/hl in Yorkshire, and as 'acceptable' in the North East. In the North West, crops are mainly being put through dryers to improve specific weights.

In Scotland, specific weights range between 48–58 kg/hl.

The widest ranges are reported for the Midlands, Eastern, and South of England. In the East Midlands, some very low specific weights have been reported, which were associated with poor yields. In the South East, most specific weights have been good but there are reports of some very poor specific weights, with an average of 53 kg/hl.

The typical GB average specific weight is ranging from 49 – 53 kg/hl.

Moisture – The GB average moisture content is currently at 15 – 16%. Since the last report, 40% of grain in the North East and South West, a quarter of crops in Yorkshire, and 20% of crops in the South East have needed drying.

WINTER OILSEED RAPE

Harvest update

Harvest is now all but complete in all regions. Harvesting was completed in the week ending 22 August in Yorkshire and South East of England, while the last crops were gathered in Scotland in the week ending 29 August. Only a very small number of fields remain to be harvested in the North East of England.

Yields

Average weekly yields ranged between 2.8 to 3.8 t/ha. Lower yields were primarily a result of inclement weather during the growing season as well as significant pest damage in some regions, particularly from Cabbage Steam Flea Beetle (CSFB).

The typical GB average is currently estimated at 2.8 – 3.0 t/ha, unchanged from the last report but below the five-year average.

Quality

Oil content – GB average is currently at 43 – 45%, the same as the last report.

Moisture – Average weekly moisture contents generally range from 8 – 12% on farm.

STRAW

For winter wheat, good straw yields are reported for most regions including the Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber, and Scotland.

The proportion being baled varies. In the South East, balers have kept behind the combines to minimise issues surrounding swaths getting wet. In Yorkshire, most is being baled quickly in comparison to winter barley straw, and good progress is also being made with baling in the East Midlands. While in the West Midlands, farmers are reluctant to leave the straw in the swath and so more is being chopped than normal. More straw has been also chopped in the North East to avoid delays in cultivations.

In the North West winter wheat straw yields have not been as good as expected and more straw has been chopped to avoid delays in sowing oilseed rape.

For spring barley, reports on bailing vary. Spring barley straw is being baled where possible in the West Midlands. But, in Eastern England, although some straw is being baled, largely it's been chopped and left in field as there is plenty of winter barley straw available. Straw yields are also variable, for example in Yorkshire & The Humber, where the highest yields are coming from early sown crops. In the North West, straw yields are poor as most crops grew to below normal heights.

Oat straw has been baled quickly in Scotland, but the picture is mixed in England. Oat straw has also been difficult to dry in the West Midlands, with reports of it still being green and damp in the East Midlands, and in Yorkshire & The Humber. Straw from spring crops has been chopped in the Eastern region as baling has been too difficult. Oat straw yields are also mixed. There were high straw yields from winter oats Eastern England, with farmers trying to bale between rain showers. But in the North West, straw yields are lower than average, especially from spring oats.