Crop Action

Issue 13 Sunday 20 July 2025

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Editor's note

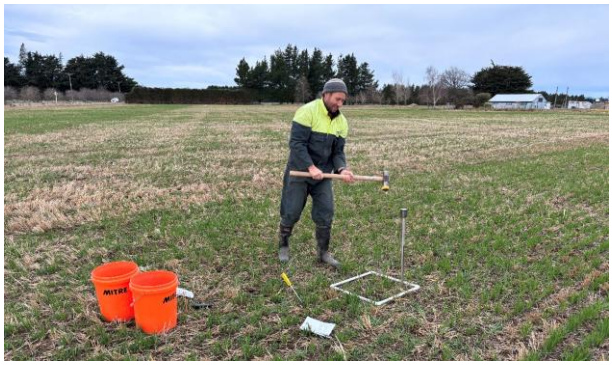
Welcome back to another winter edition of Crop Action; publication took a break last time so that FAR staff could focus on our conference. The event was well attended and very well received. If you missed out, videos from the presentations will be made available over the coming months. Two of the more entertaining of these were made by visiting speakers from the United Kingdom and Australia; click on the links to view these videos on FAR's YouTube channel – don't forget to click "Like" and "Subscribe"!

Winter is a time when activities naturally slow down, as crop growth slows to almost zero, and pests and diseases aren't generally as much of an issue. However, there are still some issues that can require attention at this time of year, with weed management (for example) among the top concerns for growers right now. As always, Crop Action will be here to provide advice on the topics that matter to you most; if there are any topics that you think should be covered, please contact the editor at ben.harvey@far.org.nz with your suggestion.

Remember also that FAR is continuing to bring you the latest useful information – the next round of workshops will cover maize – find out more about the maize events coming up in Rakaia, Hamilton and Whakatane here.

Regional updates

Southland and South Otago



It has been a fairly kind winter so far in the south. Jobs are getting ticked off the maintenance list, stock breaks are getting shifted and a few have taken the opportunity to get off farm for a break.

I spent some time last week with Templeton-based FAR researcher Owen Gibson at the FAR Southern Hub taking some soil samples (see photo below). The oat cover crop at the site is looking healthy and the ground conditions were perfect for getting the soil probe hammered in. If this prompts you to think about beginning soil testing yourself, a useful resource can be found here. Also see our article on a quick soil testing method below.

I'm working with Beef + Lamb NZ to organise an event in Riversdale in early August. The focus will be on optimising winter systems. *Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator*

South Canterbury/North Otago

There's one word that sums up our region right now - **WET**. Most growers I've spoken to recently reckon it's the wettest winter they can remember. And that's on the back of a wet harvest and a soggy autumn - so we're really going for the trifecta! While the rain has made on-farm work a bit of a challenge, the crops that are in the ground seem to be doing surprisingly well.

The optimistic among us are already looking ahead to spring. A few days of sunshine can do wonders for morale. Here's hoping it all sets the stage for a strong growing season… at least *moisture* won't be an issue this spring! *Jo Fearn, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Upper South Island

Growers are pleased to see a fine 10-day forecast, hoping that this allows the ground to start drying out so they can get any herbicide or lime-spreading jobs done. Planning for spring fertiliser and crop health programmes are on people's minds. Booking ahead with fert reps for spring soil tests is a good idea so that you have results in time to make decisions on fert programmes.

Stock are also pleased to see the sun and plenty of feed in front of them as paddocks of winter feed dry out and improve utilisation. *Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Lower North Island

Growers in the region have had a very wet start to winter, with surface flooding impacting low-lying areas. Despite the conditions, the grain maize harvest is largely complete, although yields have been average-to-poor. Crops that were planted late due to the wet spring last year were most affected and some growers did not fully fulfil their grain contracts due to low yields. Soil temperatures have been higher than usual in some areas and cover crops have generally established well. Two growers have faba beans in the ground in the Rangitikei and we will watch their progress with interest. *Megan Cushnahan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Waikato

Waterlogged soils are causing issues with soil testing, annual ryegrass cover crop harvests and livestock pugging (for those with livestock). Warmer conditions have also led to higher-than-usual numbers of pests like slugs and black beetles. Argentine stem weevils are also posing a problem, with some seed treatments showing lower efficacy than before. Weed control is a focus for many at present.

There is a growing uneasiness in the maize-growing community across the region as maize pricing is negatively affected by continuing pressure from PKE. Some observers are warning that long-term dairy supply may be at risk unless a fair pricing mechanism can ensure ongoing loyalty and cooperation from growers. *Rachel Mudge, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Crop management

General

Grass grub management

The big news this month for grass grub control has been the withdrawal of EPA approval for chlorpyrifos, the active ingredient in suSCon Green®. There is an 18-month phase out period for this product. Alternative products are few and far between when it comes to grass grub control, with biological control likely to be the only realistic option.

Grass grub may also be continuing to feed through winter – you can check by digging up a few spade squares in affected areas and seeing what the grubs look like. Larvae that are close to finishing, or have finished feeding, have fat yellowish bodies that make it difficult to see any soil in their gut. Once they finish feeding, they will move deeper into the soil profile and prepare to pupate. If larvae have finished feeding, control is not required (and is also very difficult). Here are some things to consider when managing grass grub as spring approaches:

When will feeding stop? Generally, during the one-year life cycle, larvae stop feeding and travel downward in the soil profile in July and August. Periods of limited food supply (living roots) will extend the duration of feeding into spring.

When will plant growth resume? From Canterbury south, soil temperatures are still below the 6°C required for growth of many arable crops. Growth will resume as soil temperatures increase in spring, this growth allows seedlings to tolerate a low level of attack, but when roots completely disappear plants will die.

How to promote plant growth? Where damage has occurred, consider applying nitrogen and sulphur as soil temperatures warm to promote tillering and growth. Remember that in cereals, tillering stops at the beginning of stem extension and subsequent compensation is through tiller survival and grain head size.

Map areas of damage for next year. Mapping 'hot spots' in paddocks now will allow for targeted control in late summer and autumn in preparation for the next growing season. Adults lay the majority of eggs close to their emergence location.

Further resources:

- Guidelines for the use of biopesticides
- Arable Extra – Chemical control of grass grub

Soil testing

Soil quality is an important component of growing profitable crops. A test that is useful and appropriate to carry out at this time of year is the **MiniVSA** (Mini Visual Soil Assessment) that FAR has developed specifically for arable farmers. This is a 30-minute DIY soil quality test that can be carried out by anyone with only a few simple pieces of equipment that every farmer should have on hand already. The method can be found here.

Note that FAR's upcoming maize workshops will be covering soil testing and how to make the most of the information gained from testing.

Cereals

Aphid monitoring

Aphid numbers have fallen to essentially zero and there is no risk of virus being spread from aphid activity. Monitoring is now occurring every four weeks, although a new aphid report will appear on Aphid Chat every two weeks. None of the growers at any of FAR's monitoring sites chose to apply foliar insecticides in the lead-up to winter, reflecting the lower-risk season the data suggested. This is the first time that all growers participating in the monitoring network have forgone spraying for aphids through autumn, so it will be interesting to see what effect this has on aphid populations, and especially on beneficial insects, once things start to warm up in spring.

Note also that chlorpyifos, the active ingredient in some broad-spectrum insecticides, has had EPA approval revoked. Foliar insecticides containing chlorpyrifos will be illegal to import or manufacture in six months' time.

Cereal grazing

FAR has received a few comments and inquiries about grazing of wheat crops being grown for grain. While this is not common practice in New Zealand, anecdotal evidence suggests more growers are deciding to give it a try. Wheat can provide a valuable source of high-quality forage during winter when other options are limited. FAR has conducted little research on this topic, but if you'd like to give it a go, there are some things to keep in mind:

- Grazing should be before GS31 (stem extension). When this guideline is followed, some overseas research has shown that grain yields may even be improved.
- Other possible benefits include improved weed control and a reduction in the incidence of some diseases. Soil quality may be improved in some situations.
- Some cultivars may be more suited to grazing than others. Talk to your agronomist or seed company representative if you are unsure.

Further resources that may interest you:

- Grazing of the wheat grain crop
- British article on grazing wheat to keep down brassica volunteers

Herbage

Weed control in white clover seed crops and oilseed rape

Many growers have now applied propyzamide (Group 3) herbicides (Kerb™, Polka™ and others), but the optimal application timing window is still well-and-truly open. Propyzamide works through root absorption, so applications must be made when the soil is moist and rain imminent, or during rainfall, with minimal surface debris. Air temperatures should also be below 13°C. Propyzamide controls grass weeds, and provides a good alternative to Group 1 and 2 herbicides, which have had numerous instances of herbicide resistance recorded in New Zealand. **Always read the label before using any agrichemical product.**

Sow thistle management

Now is the time to be thinking about sow thistle management in white clover crops. The key timings for chemical control utilising 2,4-D ester (Group 4 Mode of Action) are during July and August before temperatures warm up. The sub-species of sow thistle present in your crop may influence levels of control.

FAR trials in the 2020/21 season identified some additional herbicide options for sow thistle control. Products containing MCPA (Group 4) such as Agritone® and Tropotox® were effective, but suppressed yield when applied in July. Better results were obtained when application was made in August and September. For more information see:

- Identifying sow thistle
- Annual Research Results 2020/21 (pages 57-59)
- Annual Research Results 2019/20 (pages 48-52)

Weather Updates

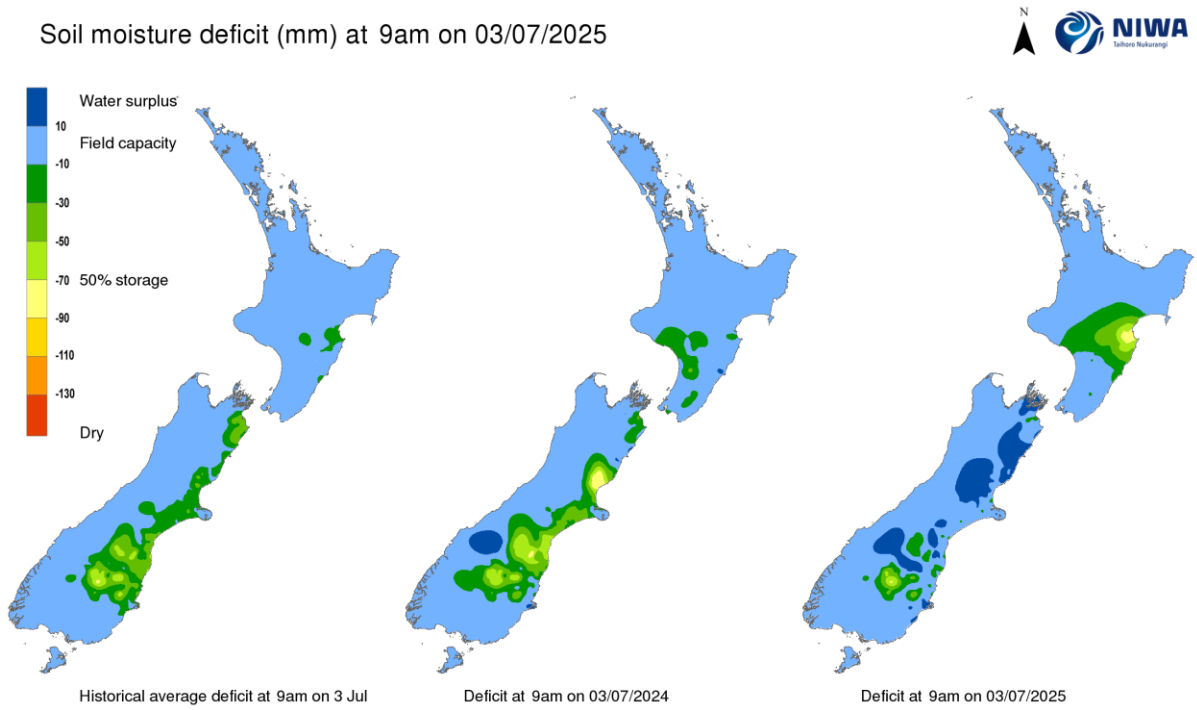
Long-term climate outlook

The seasonal climate outlook for July-September from Earth Sciences NZ (formerly NIWA) shows a fairly stable system, with the chances for La Niña conditions to develop by the end of the year diminishing to around 30%. However, tropical and sub-tropical influences on New Zealand's weather could be significant, leading to an increased risk of heavy rainfall events throughout the three-month period. Cold snaps and frosts are expected to be less frequent than the average, with air temperatures across the board likely to be above what is normal for the time of year.

FAR weather tool

The FAR online weather tool is a great way to track weather patterns and to compare the current season's conditions with those of previous years. You can check it out here. Click on the link and select the weather station closest to you from the drop-down box at the top right of the screen. Please contact us if you have any queries about the tool, or suggestions on how to make it better.

Soil moisture data: see more from NIWA here.



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