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Editor's note

After a couple of weeks of proper winter weather, the temperatures have started to feel more spring-like this week. There is a good amount of growth on many autumn-sown crops, with one grower in South Canterbury reporting up to 20 tillers per plant on his barley! At any rate, there is a little bit of optimism creeping in to conversations regarding this coming harvest, but, with an El Niño predicted, the big pressure point may be water availability. However, that is still some way off, and technically we are still in winter, so there is some time to get plans in place.

Regional Updates

Southland

Winter has been going well with good ground conditions. Most reports about crop establishment are positive, although there are also a few slugs about. Soil temperatures are a couple of degrees above average. Some growers may need to look at their fertiliser plans as crops may need a bit of fertiliser earlier than usual due to the good autumn and mild winter. *(Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

South Canterbury

Where ground conditions allow, some growers are preparing seed beds for spring planting while others have been able to get out and get crop in the ground. Despite the dry weather, ground conditions are still quite soft in places. Early spring fertiliser and spray programmes have commenced. *(Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

Mid Canterbury

After a very mild and dry winter, crops are looking strong across the region and spring planting is under way in good cultivation conditions; although some growers would welcome a little rain. Soil nitrogen levels may be higher than normal due to the warmer weather, so consider testing before finalising fertiliser decisions. Now is also the time to install soil moisture probes so they are settled and ready to support irrigation decisions this spring. Looking ahead, WeedSmart NZ will be in [Ashburton on 28 August](#) for a practical workshop covering the latest approaches to herbicide resistance and integrated weed management. This workshop is primarily aimed at rural professionals, but growers are welcome too. *(Cindy Lowe, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

Northern South Island

A warm, kind and dry winter has had a positive influence on crop growth, with crops looking good and many paddocks being further forward than would be expected in mid-August. The weather has also made stock work pleasant and seen good feed utilisation.

Spring cultivation and drilling is just beginning with growers and merchants finalising spring placement. Offerings are still available from firms so growers are encouraged to call around and consider what options might best fit their business.

Given the predicted dry summer, spring crop choices may be a chance for growers to consider when peak irrigation demand will be for each crop under an irrigator and if there is an opportunity to spread this timing by changing crop choice. Re-considering sowing rates for spring crops may also be an option to manage water demand.

There continues to be movement towards livestock grazing and support on Canterbury properties, with increased interest in maize and kale for spring planting. We are hearing a mix of contracting options for feed; some are growing uncontracted, but many are contracting with the purchaser before planting. Various contracting arrangements have the purchaser paying seed costs; another grower is receiving instalments throughout the growing season with a final wash up payment once crop is harvested, this arrangement helping with cashflow for both grower and purchaser.

Lime is being spread and spring fertiliser programmes are not far away. There is still time to get soil N tests completed to help calculate your total nitrogen needs for the season. FARS soil [N supply calculator](#) can help you convert your lab results and estimate fertiliser needs. *(Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

South-west North Island

Consecutive frosts and a week of cold southerlies have soil temperatures down well under 10 degrees. Dry ground conditions mean good feed utilisation, with some grass growth starting and paddocks drying out enough to think about applying base fertiliser and incorporating grain stubble. Some growers are irrigating to support grass growth. *(Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Interim Regional Facilitator)*

Eastern North Island

In the southern Eastern North Island, ground temperatures are very low and any grass growth that was triggered by the sunshine has stopped. Growers are looking for some sun, heat and clear days to get spring ground prepared for planting. Hawkes Bay, like the rest of the Southern North Island, has had fine, frosty weather. Growers are looking ahead and planning for an early season to reduce the risk associated with the summer dry. *(Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Interim Regional Facilitator)*

Northern North Island/Waikato

Ground conditions have been reasonably dry so far this winter, do watch those spots that look dry but are wet as the [Once a Day Farmer](#) found out. Some grass silage is starting to be harvested. Waikato has had a run of quite hard frosts (-1°C to -5°C) which has helped to kill a few pests (e.g. FAW). *(Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Interim Regional Facilitator)*

Crop management

General

Preparing for a dry summer

The impacts of El Niño have been evident across the Northern Hemisphere, and below-average rainfall and dry conditions are forecast for eastern regions of New Zealand. Now is the time to ensure irrigation

systems are operating effectively and to install or reinstate soil moisture probes to support informed irrigation scheduling. Installing probes while there is still good soil moisture helps them settle properly, providing solid baseline data before soils start drying out. It's much harder to establish useful probe data once moisture levels begin to drop. Some of the biggest irrigation efficiency gains are achieved at the start and end of the irrigation season.

It's also worth having irrigation pumps and irrigators serviced to avoid breakdowns and delays early in the season. A conversation with your service provider now could save a lot of headaches later.

Further reading:

- [MPI resource: preparing for El Niño](#)
- [Technology Update 001: A guide to moisture monitoring systems](#)
- [Irrigation management for perennial ryegrass seed crops](#)
- [Irrigation management for browntop seed crops](#)

Wild oat management

Wild oat herbicide resistance is increasingly problematic, particularly in Canterbury. While ryegrass species remain the number one concern in terms of frequency of cases across New Zealand, wild oats (*Avena fatua*) are not far behind.) Wild oats are not allowed in herbage seed crops (tetraploid ryegrass and brome species) at crop inspection or in seed samples at seed testing.

Start planning for spring wild oat management now. Cool, moist conditions promote maximum emergence. The key to managing wild oats is an integrated approach; start by walking your crops in early spring. If plants are identified, rogueing is an effective way of reducing pressure.

Wild oat control is often managed using herbicides, with the most effective options generally being those containing Group 1 Mode of Action active ingredients such as pinoxaden (Twinax® XTRA) and fenoxaprop (Puma® S and others). While these products remain effective if used correctly in most cases, herbicide resistance to Group 1 chemistry in wild oats has been detected in many regions of New Zealand. Anecdotal evidence suggests it is widespread, particularly in Canterbury.

Post-emergence options for wild oat control in ryegrass seed crops are particularly limited. Fenoxaprop (Mode of Action Group 1) has been the main go-to for growers, but if resistance is known or suspected, few alternatives exist. Products containing the Group 0 active flamprop (Crusader™, Stratos®) are registered for wild oat control in ryegrass, but there are reports of reduced effectiveness in this situation, which may or may not be due to evolved resistance, as this has never been tested.

Your best weapon against herbicide resistance is a robust rotation that allows the use of other herbicide modes of action. In the case of wild oats, trifluralin and propyzamide are effective, so crops like oilseed rape or peas can help control a wild oat resistance issue.

[Click here to see a list of herbicides registered for use on wild oats in cereals, pulses and ryegrass.](#)

Information about submitting weed seed samples for resistance testing can be found [here](#).

Aphanomyces testing

FAR has just ordered its *Aphanomyces* test in preparation for a Pea ascochyta trial at Chertsey. If you are spring sowing peas this year, you should also be ordering seed and carrying out soil disease tests. Order your seed now, especially if you are planting in September, and soil test to check for the level of the soil-borne pathogen *Aphanomyces* (these tests can take up to six weeks, so getting in early is crucial). The [Making Peas Pay](#) publication is a useful source of information on this topic.

Cereals

Cereal grazing

FAR is hearing more and more growers talk about routinely grazing autumn-sown wheat crops that are being grown for grain. 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 are interested in trying it, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Grazing should be before GS 31 (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.
- Be aware of how aphid flight activity in the area is tracking immediately after grazing. While grazing can help with reducing virus load in older leaves, as well as sometimes removing aphid colonies, the plant will be stressed after grazing. This can make the plant susceptible to aphid-borne viruses, and so it is important to [monitor aphid flights](#) and growing-degree days to identify any possible risk periods.
- 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](#)

Planning for spring sowing

The spring edition of FAR's Cultivar Performance Trial (CPT) booklet is out now; you can read it [here](#). To get the best out of establishment consider the management tips below.

- **Seed bed:** A trashy seedbed may reduce seed/soil contact, thus reducing germination, while a compacted seedbed may restrict emergence. A seedbed with large clods may cause seedlings to become deformed (and therefore weakened) as they attempt to emerge.
- **Sowing depth:** Sown too shallow, seed may be subject to bird damage and susceptible to drying out. If seed is sown too deep, young plants will struggle to emerge and may be weak and prone to disease or deformity. Check that your drill is placing seed at optimum depth.
- **Nutrition and moisture:** Plant roots follow the easiest path for growth, so nutrition should be placed near the roots. Some fertilisers, however, will "burn" seedlings, so they must be placed out of direct contact with the seed. Moisture is essential for seed germination. Once germinated, the young seedling is also very fragile and may dry out rapidly if there is insufficient moisture in the root zone. Too much moisture (waterlogging) will mean oxygen starvation, which will lead to germination failure or seedling death.

- **Weeds, diseases and pests:** Weeds will compete with the crop for light, moisture and nutrients. Weeds can be more of a problem in thinly sown (or poorly established) crops. The main disease problem for emerging seedlings is fungi affecting the new roots; this is more likely to occur in a cool, damp environment when seedlings are less vigorous and therefore more prone to attack.
- Seed treatment with fungicides may be beneficial if seed-borne diseases are a concern, but these treatments can also delay crop emergence. If slugs, weevils, grass grubs, etc are present, control options should be evaluated.
- **Time of sowing:** Sowing in early autumn or late spring, when soils are warm and moisture is (hopefully) ideal, should speed up germination and increase seedling emergence rates.

Aphid monitoring

The South Island it is starting to warm up now, although we are still a long way from the temperatures required to increase aphid numbers. Sticky trap monitoring is still recording zero (or close to zero) aphids per trap. However, there is also collective wariness after last season.

What does this mean for you?

Those with autumn-sown cereals should keep a sharp eye on the weather in late September/early October, especially if no foliar insecticide has been applied yet this season. If you sprayed in autumn there should be a lot less secondary spread through the crop from over-wintering colonies. This can be hard to spot, especially early in spring. Beneficial insects will further slow aphid activity.

Keep an eye on [Aphid Chat](#) to see when aphid flights start to increase. Flights occurring before the crop reaches GS 32, present a significant risk. We are still some weeks away from these issues, but, as one grower commented last year; “if you find yourself wearing shorts when you usually wouldn’t, then it might be a good time to scout for aphids and consider an insecticide”.

Remember also that your choice of insecticide can have a large impact on the remainder of the season. Broad spectrum sprays will also kill beneficial insects, which are important in delaying the buildup of aphid populations after a spray event.

Herbage

Nitrogen on ryegrass seed crops

Soil testing should be happening now in ryegrass seed crops. A ryegrass seed crop needs a total of about 172 kg N/ha (applied N plus soil mineral N), but this can be reduced by 20-30 kg/ha if there is adequate potentially mineralisable N in the soil. Avoid applying large amounts of N fertiliser to ryegrass seed crops too early, as this can lead to lodging. Note that the 172 kg/ha of N doesn’t include any Potentially Mineralisable Nitrogen (PMN) which might become available during the season. PMN would need to be above 90 kg/ha in order to reduce applied N below 172 kg/ha. Note, however, that this advice has not been thoroughly tested with robust research.

For more information, check out the resources below.

- [N Smart: Six soil-driven steps to smarter nitrogen fertiliser decisions](#)
- [Nitrogen: The confidence to cut back, FAR Focus 14](#)
- [Nitrogen use on ryegrass seed crops](#)

Maize

Terminating cover crops

Termination needs to be managed to prevent the cover crop competing with the maize for resources. If the cover crop is being retained (not harvested), there can be challenges planting into residue as the mat can affect planting and seedling emergence, and residue can 'hair-pin' in seed trenches affecting slot closure and seed-to-soil contact.

Herbicides are the main method of termination and are usually applied four to six weeks before planting. Other considerations that could change this timing include:

- C/N ratios. Generally, cover crops with high dry matter and high C/N ratio (annual ryegrass, oats) should be terminated earlier, while low C/N ratio cover crops (legumes) can be terminated closer to planting. A short duration between terminating high C/N cover crops and maize planting often results in a 'yield drag'. The reasons for this are not fully understood, but FAR research indicates that applying N is not an effective workaround.
- Early termination supports root breakdown and can help avoid nutrient tie-up, especially nitrogen. Root breakdown also supports effective cultivation.
- A 'brown bridge' period helps minimise insect populations and risk where insect pests are a potential issue.
- Mineralisation from cultivation can reduce the time required between termination and planting.

Find out more about cover crops [here](#). You also might like to check out the booklet FAR's recent Maize Winter Workshops [here](#).

Oilseed rape

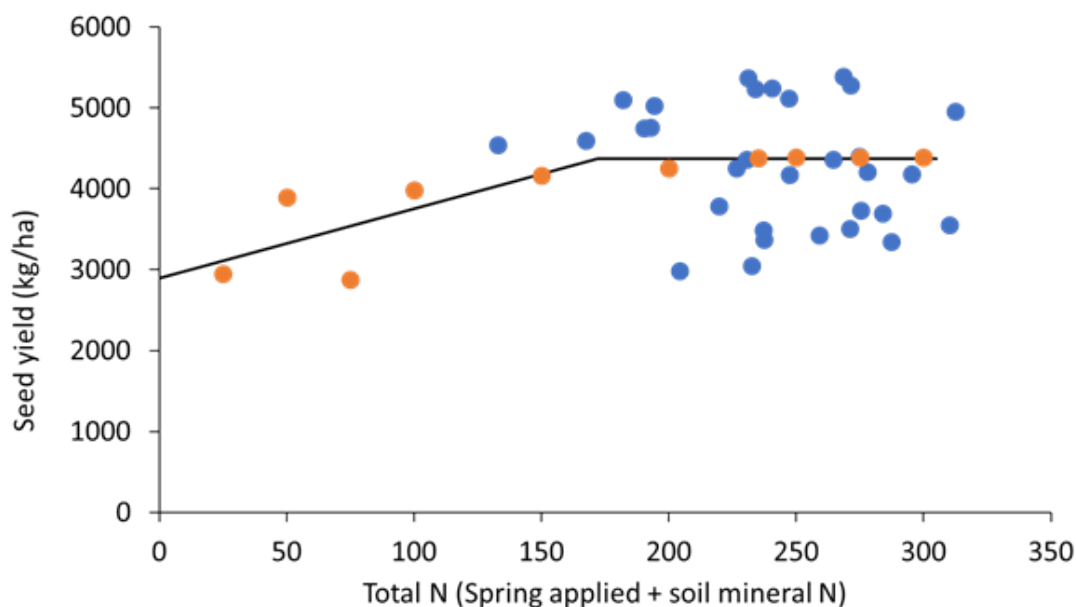
Early spring is the time to apply nitrogen, ideally in the form of sulphate of ammonia (SoA), to oilseed rape crops. SoA has advantages over urea when applied at this time of year:

- It is less prone to leaching.
- It is more resistant to volatilization.
- It supplies sulphur (S) to the crop.

Oilseed rape requires more sulphur than most crops (about 40-50 kg/ha); about double the requirement that wheat has, for example. The amount applied depends on the Green Area Index (GAI) of the crop. If the crop has a GAI of less than 1 (see [here](#) for advice on how to calculate this) more (between 200 and 250 kg/ha) SoA can be added, or urea can be added to the standard SoA rate of 100 to 125 kg/ha. Earlier application is also advised.

The total N requirement for an oilseed rape crop in spring is approximately 170 kg/ha, where this total is made up of both applied N and soil mineral N. The figure below shows seed yield from the South Canterbury Monitor Farm Study (MFS) paddocks in blue plotted against total available nitrogen calculated as the sum of the applied and mineral N. The orange points show the OSR seed yield response to nitrogen in small plot trials when three trials are averaged together. The response is 8.5 kg seed per unit of N up to ~170 kg N/ha. The average applied N rate in the MFS paddocks in the most recent year for which data is available was approximately 175 kg N/ha, compared to 190 kg N/ha the previous year. Nitrogen use by growers in this study has been steadily falling over the course of the study, and there may be some room to reduce N rates further based on soil mineral N values.

However, it is important to apply early spring N to help increase canopy size if plants are small and have reduced leaf area compared with other seasons.



Potassium (K) will also be needed by the crop in early spring – know your soil levels and add extra K as needed. Consult your agronomist for further information.

Weather Updates

Long-term climate outlook

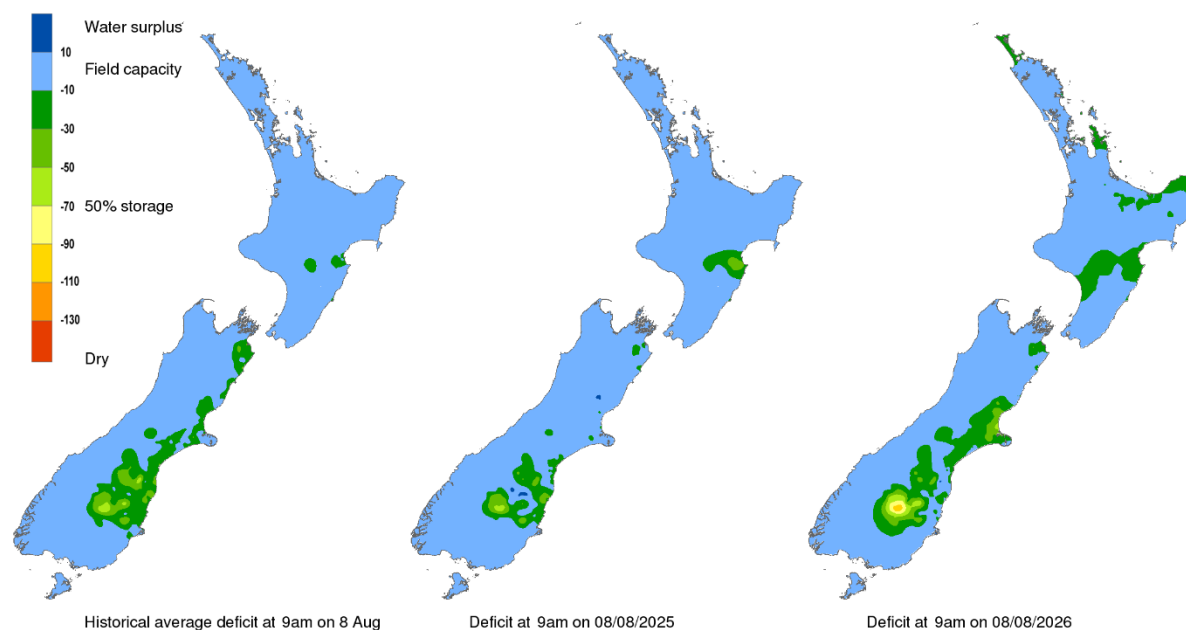
According to [Earth Sciences New Zealand](#), El Niño conditions continue to build and are expected to strengthen further over the next three months. Heading into spring, westerly air flows will become more common, and temperatures will be near average or above average. August (as we have already seen) will have some spells of cold weather as usual. Rainfall totals over the next three months are expected to be either average or below average, except for the north and west of the North Island, which should plan for below average rainfall. The South Island's West Coast should expect high rainfall, as is typical of El Niño. There could also be heavy rain events in Southland from time to time.

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. There are also a number of tools available to help with predicting disease and pest pressure. 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 Earth Sciences NZ [here](#).

Soil moisture deficit (mm) at 9am on 08/08/2026



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