

Issue 19 Sunday 18 October 2026

In this issue of Crop Action:

- [General: Does your crop need micronutrients?](#)
- [Cereals: Spring disease management, Aphid monitoring](#)
- [Herbage: Disease management in turf ryegrass seed crops, Small broomrape management in clover](#)
- [Maize: Greasy cutworm management, Pre-emergence herbicides in maize](#)
- [Weather updates: Long-term climate outlook, FAR weather tool and soil moisture data](#)

Editor's note

Apart from harvest, October often seems to be the busiest time for arable growers, with so many decisions being made on irrigation, disease and pest management, fertiliser, and plant growth regulators, among others. The information in this issue of Crop Action is focused on decision making at this very busy time.

El Niño is creating some uncertainty for growers, with one of the biggest worries being if things will get dry. It may be worth thinking about reducing inputs (fertiliser, PGRs) on crops where the yield may be limited by moisture. No-till and strip-till maize can also have greater benefits when trying to conserve soil moisture.

Regional Updates

Southland

A well-timed warm weather window has allowed growers in the south to begin to catch up on fertiliser and spray applications. There are reports of rainfall totals of between 250mm and 500mm for August and September around parts of Southland! Despite this, the ground has dried fast. Ground preparation for planting spring crops is well underway and some barley has been sown.

Plans can become outdated fast. Grower Howard Clarke summed it up well at a wet weather discussion on Monday night: "deal with what is in front of you and adjust to what you are looking at". We don't know what is around the corner but the "Super El Niño" is here and the wetter weather may return. You may find a recent talk by Chris Brandalino from Earth and Ocean Science of interest [here](#). (Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator).

South Canterbury/North Otago

Good recent rainfall which has set the arable farming up for the rest of spring. There is some disease about, so be vigilant. There is the opportunity to spend money on fungicides as the yield gain is still there. Urea has gone on in time for the rain. (Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Regional Facilitator).

Mid Canterbury

Spring has been kind, with good soil temperatures and enough rainfall to maintain soil moisture in most areas. Most spring crops, including some fodder crops, are now in the ground and maize paddocks are being prepared for drilling. Autumn-sown crops are looking good. Some irrigation has started, although most growers are watching the forecast before switching systems on. It's been a busy week getting planting and spraying finished ahead of the forecast rain.

Spray and fertiliser programmes are well underway. Some [rust](#) has been reported in milling wheat, while feed wheat is looking good. Lambs have done well over winter, prices are good, and they'll start leaving the farm shortly. *(Cindy Lowe, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

Northern South Island

Spring crop planting (excluding maize) is now pretty much compete, with the focus shifting to fertiliser and crop health programmes as key timings are reached. Reports are that both autumn and spring cereals are looking strong across the region. A few irrigators are being turned on to wash fertiliser in but forecast rain has kept the pressure off. Keep watching soil moisture probes, as the shoulders of the season are when they can really be helpful in informing decisions about when to turn on (or not).

Ryegrass paddocks are being closed and rolled, and closing nitrogen applications are going on. Alongside ryegrass closing, lambs are heading away at pleasing weights and good prices. *(Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

Northern North Island

At FAR's Northern Crop Research Site (NCRS) near Hamilton, early planting of non-trial plots was completed by 3 October (109-CRM) and came up in about 12-14 days. Planting of trials will start this week (CRM 97-99). We have had some welcome showers, and more are forecast in next few days, so we will be working around these and hopefully will manage to get everything planted on schedule. NCRS started with good soil moisture, around 33% at 100mm, but has started dropping toward 30% over the last week. Our contractor said that NCRS was the "wettest" of all the farms, so some farms may be getting dry; hopefully the rain this week may help. *(Steven Payne, FAR Senior Field Research Officer)*

Crop management

General

Does your crop need micronutrients?

FAR has received a few enquiries about whether it is worth applying a product that provides micronutrients to the crop. "Essential" micronutrients are trace elements that are essential for crop growth, but in very small quantities. Other micronutrients are important for animal health but not essential for crop growth.

Essential micronutrients		Micronutrients for animal health	
Boron	B	Cobalt	Co
Iron	Fe	Selenium	Se
Copper	Cu	Iodine	I
Manganese	Mn	Fluorine	F
Molybdenum	Mo		
Nickel	Ni		
Zinc	Zn		
Chlorine	Cl		

Further reading:

- Figure 1:** Using plant tissue symptoms to identify nutrient deficiencies.



Spring disease management

Autumn-sown cereals are now at, or approaching, T1 fungicide timing, with some will already past this point. The extent to which disease develops in a crop is a balance between disease pressure and field resistance. Disease pressure for *Septoria tritici* blotch (STB) varies between seasons and is determined by the amount of inoculum present, weather conditions and region. The key weather indicators for disease pressure are wet weather and high relative humidity (>85% for 20 hours or more) between the start of stem extension (GS30) and the end of ear emergence (GS59), especially during October and November. By monitoring weather conditions during this period, growers can determine disease pressure and an appropriate disease management programme. Field resistance is determined by cultivar and crop management (sowing date, stubble management, etc).

The tables below can be used to estimate the length of time between a risk period and the first STB symptoms appearing. Use Table 1 to look for risk periods in your region, then add the latent period from Table 2 to find the optimum time to spray for STB.

Additional resources:

- Latest arable updates on fungicide resistance and management:
 - [Cereal Update 232](#)
 - [Cereal Update 233](#)
 - [Cereal Update 234](#)
 - [Cereal Update 235](#)
 - [Cereal Update 236](#)
 - [Cereal Update 237](#)
- [2024 Cereal disease management strategy](#)
- [Cut the Crop](#)

Table 1: Risk periods (relative humidity periods (RH>85%)) for the past four weeks (September 13th, 2026, to October 11th, 2026) for key cereal-growing regions of New Zealand. Risk periods are represented by red boxes.

Date	September														October														
Site	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Methven																													
Wakanui																													
Timaru																													
Fairlie																													
Gore																													
Levin																													

Table 2. Latent period (days) of STB from September 13th to October 11th, 2026.

	2026
Methven	24
Wakanui	23
Timaru	26
Fairlie	25
Gore	25
Levin	23

Table 3. Total precipitation in mm from September 13th to October 11th, 2026.

	2026
Methven	56
Wakanui	36
Timaru	32
Fairlie	49
Gore	115
Levin	30

Aphid monitoring

Although last week's monitoring data didn't detect a significant increase in winged aphids, there are other things to consider. The second week of October last year was significantly warmer than usual, which was the most likely reason why we observed a huge explosion in aphid numbers towards the end of that month. This October saw a similarly warm week, although not as extreme, but we would still expect to see aphid numbers building very soon. We have also started to find scattered wingless aphid colonies in direct searching in Canterbury and observed an increase in some beneficial insects which can indicate that there are aphids around for them to predate or parasitise.

All autumn-sown crops that FAR directly monitor are now past GS32. Past research has shown that infection with aphid-borne viruses after GS32 does not affect yield significantly. Spring-sown crops are more vulnerable, and growers will often time a single spray to hit the period after seed coating protection runs out (GS21) but before GS32. This period can often be very short in spring-sown crops, which is why a single spray is usually sufficient. If an aphid infestation after GS32 is particularly heavy, some growers will continue to spray, however research data on how this benefits yield is inconclusive. You can see the latest aphid data at [Aphid Chat](#).

Herbage

Disease management in turf ryegrass seed crops

The principal disease limiting seed yield in turf perennial ryegrass seed crops is stem rust (*Puccinia graminis* subsp. *graminicola*). The first application of fungicide for these crops typically goes on at GS32, coinciding with the emergence of final leaf three. Follow-up sprays are required at ear emergence and flowering, with a fourth spray included two weeks later if disease pressure is high. FAR is currently preparing a comprehensive update on this topic to be published in November, but in the meantime, some key considerations are listed below.

- The GS32 application is often thought of as a preventative measure, since the severity of how the disease will present is not known at that stage. In some seasons and under some market conditions, the GS32 fungicide application may not be economically beneficial.
- Fungicides from multiple modes of action (DMI (triazoles), QoIs, SDHIs) should be included in the programme but always keep in mind that some products are limited in the number of times they can be used in a season. Consult with your agronomist and always read the label of any agrichemical product before use.
- Fungicide resistance is a continual threat. Fungicides from different Fungicide Resistance Action Committee (FRAC) mode of action groups should be used in mixtures or with alternation within a programme wherever possible.
- Proline (prothioconazole, Group 3) is the backbone of stem rust programmes, but FAR data shows benefits in including strobilurins and SDHIs to the programme. These will also help prevent fungicide resistance.
- A tool to predict when weather conditions are favourable for stem rust spore germination is available in the "Weather" section of the [FAR website](#). Click on the "Pest & Disease" section at the top of the page.
- As harvest approaches, any fungicide application should be planned to ensure the product's withholding period can be met before cutting.

Management is different for forage-type seed crops. New Zealand-bred forages have a lower stem rust risk, but a starting programme for managing stem rust will normally incorporate fungicide applications at GS32 with a PGR, plus one application at head emergence. It is also important to note that many forage-types will include a proprietary endophyte. Proline® can significantly impact endophyte viability on sensitive endophyte strains. Identify the endophyte strain carried by the cultivar and confirm the seed company's endophyte requirements before finalising the fungicide programme.

Small broomrape management in clover

The parasitic weed small broomrape (*Orobanche minor*, see photo below) can be a significant issue in clover seed crops, as some export markets require the crop to be free of this weed at inspection. Seed yield may not be affected by the weed except in stressed (e.g. dryland) crops. Control options are limited, but FAR trials have shown herbicides such as Equate® (imazethapyr, Group 2) to be effective if applied before the weed emerges. October and early November were shown to be effective in one trial. Read the full Arable Update [here](#).



Maize

Greasy cutworm management

Greasy cutworm (*Agrotis ipsilon*) is a serious pest of maize, with some growers reporting severe losses last season. The mild winter and prevailing El Niño conditions also create favourable conditions for another bad season for this pest. Clothianidin seed treatment (Poncho®, a Group 4A insecticide), a stomach poison, requires the cutworm to sever a maize plant before dying, making it effective under low pest pressure only. Alternatively, a synthetic pyrethroid (SP) can be added to the pre-emergence herbicide mix. SPs act through contact with treated soil as cutworm emerge at night, potentially controlling the pest before maize emergence.

Integrated pest management (IPM) based on pest counts, damage assessments and economic thresholds is more challenging for cutworm than for most other species. There is a lack of research establishing thresholds etc. Cutworms sever plants rather than simply damaging them, so monitoring is effectively counting dead plants. Field scouting cannot reliably establish cutworm populations without carrying out test digs, because larvae remain hidden below the soil surface. Some other IPM practices, such as employing a six-week fallow and employing weed control during this period to remove green bridges can be useful. However, a single, well-timed insecticide application (approximately \$17/ha) remains the key strategy for many growers. Reactive spraying following damage incurs an additional application cost and cannot recover plants already lost.

While insecticide resistance is a legitimate concern, cutworm control generally involves only one SP application, usually alongside clothianidin, which has a different mode of action. This considerably reduces the risk of resistance development.

You can read more on this topic [here](#).

Pre-emergence herbicides in maize

Getting the most out of your pre-emergence herbicides requires an understanding of the factors that can affect how successful they are. The first step is to have an idea of what weeds are likely to come up based on paddock history, and whether there has been any history of herbicide resistance, either in the paddock or in the area. As always, it is important to use a range of herbicide modes of action (MoAs – see Table 1) across the whole rotation to lower the chances of herbicide resistant weeds developing.

Some other important considerations include:

- Time of planting: earlier sowing increases the likelihood of needing a follow-up post-emergence spray.
- Weather forecast. Most pre-emergence herbicides need moisture to activate the active ingredient, or else they need to be incorporated into the soil.
- Soil type, crop residue and soil organic matter can influence herbicide effectiveness. Read the label and/or consult with your agronomist.

Further reading:

- [Maize Update 90](#)
- [FAR Focus 17 – Maize Weed Management](#)

Table 1: Selective pre-emergent herbicides registered for use in both maize silage and grain crops.

Mode of Action Group Number	Active ingredient	Type	Products	Primary weed target
3	pendimethalin	pre- and post-emergence	AGPRO pendimethalin, Stomp [®] Xtra, Strada [®]	Broadleaf + grasses
5	terbuthylazine	pre- and post-emergence	Assett [™] , AGPRO terbuthylazine, Magneto [®] , Terb 500 [™] , Terbaflor, Timberwolf	Broadleaf
14	saflufenacil	pre-emergence	Sharpen [®]	Broadleaf.
15	acetochlor	pre-emergence	Ace [™] , Acetoken, Acierto [®] , Agcare [®] acetochlor, AGPRO acetochlor, Donaghys acetochlor, Joker [®] , Maize Guard [®] , Roustabout [®] , Smart acetochlor, Sylon [®]	Grasses + some broadleaves including: Amaranthus species, black nightshade, chickweed, redroot, Scotch thistle, seedling dock, shepherd's purse, stinking mayweed, rayless mayweed, twin cress
	alachlor	pre-emergence	Alaken, Corral [®] , Cyclone [®] , Encaps [®] , Merit [®] , Taipan [®]	Grasses + some broadleaf, including: black nightshade, fathen, redroot.
	dimethenamid	pre-emergence	Frontier [®]	Grasses + some broadleaves including: apple of Peru, black nightshade, fathen, redroot, seedling dock, spurrey, twin cress, willow weed
	metolachlor	pre-emergence	Guvnor [™] Gold, Metoken Gold, Super Maestro	Annual grasses
	propachlor	pre-emergence	Ramrod [®]	Grasses + some broadleaf, including chickweed and groundsel. Only susceptible at higher rates: fathen and redroot
27	mesotrione	pre- and post-emergence	AGPRO Mesotrione, Dominator [®] , Donaghys Lektor, Mesoflex [®] , Primera [®]	Broadleaf including: Bathurst bur, black nightshade, chickweed, dandelion, fathen, fennel, fishtail oxalis, Galinsoga, hairy nightshade, hemlock, mallow, redroot, seedling docks, spurrey, stagger weed, twin cress, willow weed and wire weed

Weather Updates

Long-term climate outlook

The following is a direct quote from [Earth Sciences New Zealand](#) (ESNZ): “Very strong El Niño conditions are now present in the tropical Pacific and are expected to strengthen further. El Niño’s influence on New Zealand’s weather patterns is becoming increasingly apparent and is expected to be a dominant driver of climate patterns during the outlook period.”

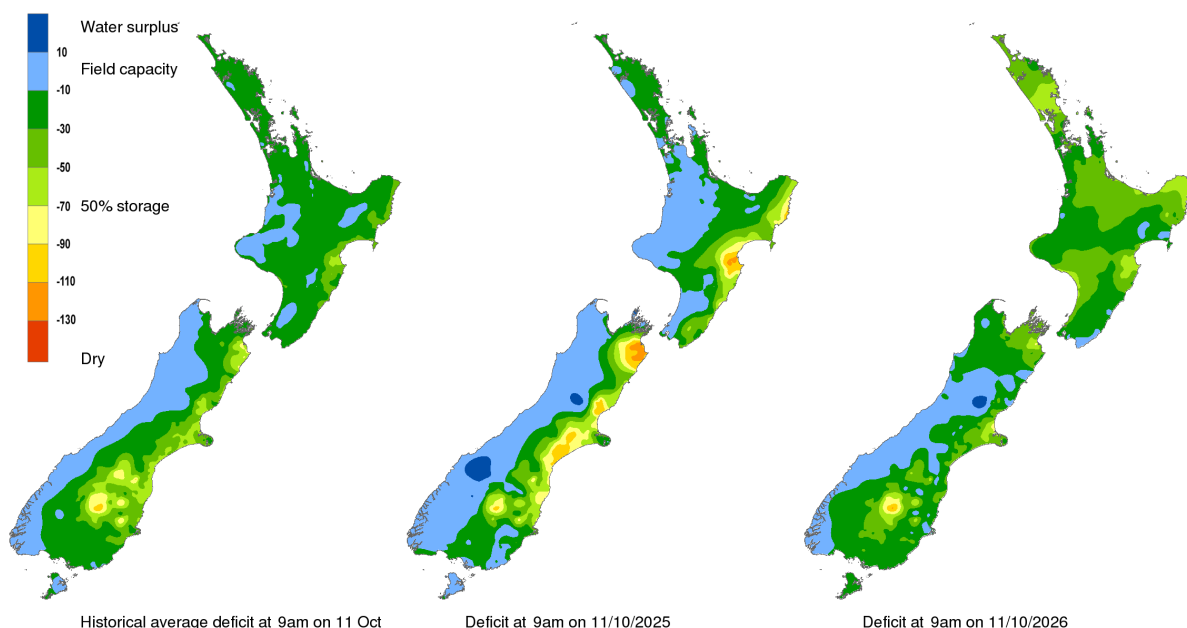
What this means for New Zealand is more (and stronger) westerly air flows, with more frequent fronts for the west and south and drier conditions in the east. It is important to remember that we are also likely to experience significant deviations from this pattern with bouts of heavy rainfall from time to time. In general, though, the weather is likely to be warmer and more variable than average. The South Island currently has healthy soil moisture, river flows, and snow and lake storage, but some parts of the North Island are starting to become dry. The north and east of the North Island are the most likely to experience challenges from dry conditions. Read more on El Niño [here](#).

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 11/10/2026



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