Crop Action

Issue 2 Sunday 1 February 2026

In this issue of Crop Action:

Editor's note

As has become all too common in the last five years, arable growers around the country are currently facing challenges with wet conditions at harvest. Nevertheless, harvest is continuing when breaks in the weather occur and reports received at FAR suggest things don't seem to be quite as bad as 2022 in Canterbury or 2023 in the North Island.

FAR research has not escaped the weather, staff playing catch up on harvesting of many of our trials. Most CPT trials are still to be harvested, although we recently released the first of our Harvest Snippets. Summaries of results from the CPT trials can give an insight on cereal cultivar performance – the St Andrew's autumn barley trial yield was 2t below the 4-year mean illustrating the issues faced by growers this season. The linked page above will continue to be updated as more data come in, so keep checking back regularly.

We hope that you find some useful advice in this issue of Crop Action as you continue with harvest and begin to look forward to autumn plantings.

Crop management

General

Harvesting in wet conditions

Rain across the country has delayed harvest for some growers, particularly in Canterbury, which may lead to some crops being cut and/or harvested at non-optimal times. Windrowed grass seed crops may have regrowth coming through the windrow, which will make harvest more difficult and inevitably reduce yields. Reduce losses by harvesting as soon as the seed is safe to thresh, or earlier if artificial drying is available. Combine set-ups can also be adjusted to improve seed pickup, by going slowly, ensuring the knives are sharp and settings are adjusted properly.

In other crops, such as cereals, harvest may have been early to try to beat a wet forecast. These grains may need drying post-harvest; some information on this can be found in the link below. In other cases, there could be sprouting of grain in the head – there have been some reports of this in triticale and ryecorn. FAR's cultivar evaluation booklets list sprouting susceptibility, which can aid in decision-making if the crop is still standing and wet weather is forecast. Autumn- and spring-sown cultivar booklets are available for last season's harvest.

Some other resources that may be of use when considering how to overcome these sorts of challenges are listed below.

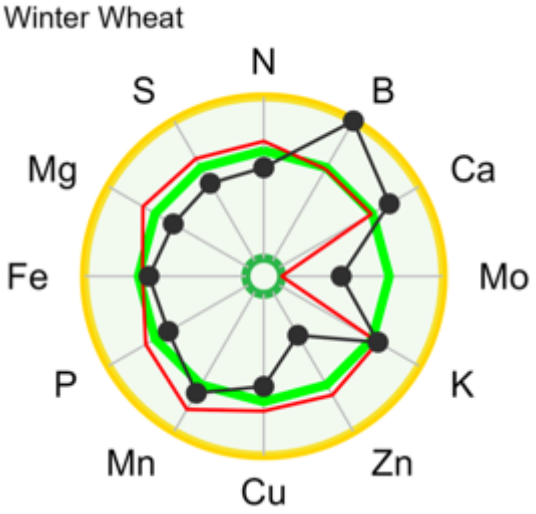
- What to do about sprouted cereal grains
- Arable Extra 128 Seed drying 101
- Use of Reglone® on windrowed grass seed crops
- Decision-making flow chart for cereals

Biosecurity update – black-grass

As discussed in the last issue of Crop Action, black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*) is a high-risk invasive grass weed in temperate cropping systems. Overseas, it has reduced yields, disrupted rotations, and developed herbicide resistance. Incursions in 2021 and 2025 are considered to have been contained, although surveillance of all sites involved ongoing. However, vigilance is still required – report any grass weeds that have seed heads above the canopy that you can't identify or you think might be black-grass. Further information is available on the Environment Canterbury website.

The value of grain testing

Last season 63 growers (mostly in the South Island) participated in the Yield Enhancement Network (YEN) programme, designed to use crop testing to measure and manage nutrients (especially N). Grain analysis can be a part of this testing and can be accessed through services such as Hills Laboratories. The results can then be used to check whether fertiliser programmes were correct, or if they could be fine-tuned in subsequent years. Reports such as the one below can show where nutrients were low or deficient (when the black dot is inside the red line), or there was an excess of that nutrient. There are other benefits as well – check out page 17 of the Summer 2024 issue of FAR's *From the Ground Up* publication. To find out how to submit a sample on the FAR website or contact donna.lill@FAR.org.nz for more information.



Slime mould

FAR staff have observed the organism pictured below at a number of locations around Canterbury, sometimes in very high concentrations. At first glance these clusters can occasionally be mistaken for aphid colonies, but on closer inspection are simply the fruiting bodies of an organism called slime mould. These are not fungi, but a separate group of organisms known as Amoebozoa.

While their appearance in large numbers can be alarming, they are not pathogenic; they simply “climb” plant stalks and leaves to form sporangia. The weather conditions in Canterbury this summer (wet, humid and warm) have led to the current proliferation. They are most likely to be observed on turf or weeds, but have been seen this season in clover seed crops (see image below).

Remember that these structures do not harm the plant apart from preventing photosynthesis in the spots where they are situated and will go away on their own. No intervention is required.

Above: Sporangia (fruiting bodies) of *Physarum cinereum*, a species of slime mould, found on perennial ryegrass near Chertsey, Mid-Canterbury in January 2026. Photo credit: Ashley Mills.

Above: Slime mould fruiting bodies on a white clover seed crop near Methven. Photo credit: Sean Weith.

Check Your Rain Gauge Regularly to Ensure Accurate Readings

If you use a rain gauge as part of a moisture monitoring system or weather station, it's important to check it regularly for blockages. Rain gauges are often installed at height and can be easy to overlook, but a clear warning sign of a blockage is when no rainfall is recorded after a known rain event.

Blockages commonly occur when debris is blown into the collection bowl. If the gauge is not bird-proof, birds may build nests inside the unit, while spiders and spider webs can also slow down or completely stop the tipping mechanism from operating correctly. A blocked collection bowl is usually easy to spot, but internal issues—such as nests or spider webs—require the bucket to be removed so the internal mechanism can be inspected.

Most rain gauges are relatively easy to take apart and check. If there is no obvious obstruction, the issue may be corroded or damaged wire terminals, which is typically a job best handled by your service provider.

The photos shown here were all taken within a month of the previous inspection. High summer winds, grass grub beetles, bird droppings, and general dirt are all common causes of blockages. These examples highlight how quickly problems can develop, even when gauges are inspected regularly.

To get the most accurate data from your rain gauge, make inspections part of your routine maintenance. If you suspect your readings are still inaccurate, contact your service provider—many can test or recalibrate the gauge to ensure it is working correctly.

Photo credit: Chris Smith

Herbage

Clover thrips

Further to the article in the last issue of Crop Action, high numbers of thrips are still being observed in both red and white clover seed crops in Canterbury. To ascertain whether numbers are high enough to cause yield damage pick ten intact seed heads and shake each one over a piece of white paper. The dark-coloured thrips will fall out and should be easily visible. An average of more than five thrips per flower head is considered enough to warrant action. There are a number of insecticide options, such as Mavrik® (tau-fluvalinate, Group 3), but other, more bee-friendly products exist. A follow-up spray may be required after 10-14 days. Check with your agricultural rep or other rural professional for advice and always read the label before spraying.

Red clover thrips: (L) Larvae are a rust red colour and adults can be seen (R) on clover flowers.

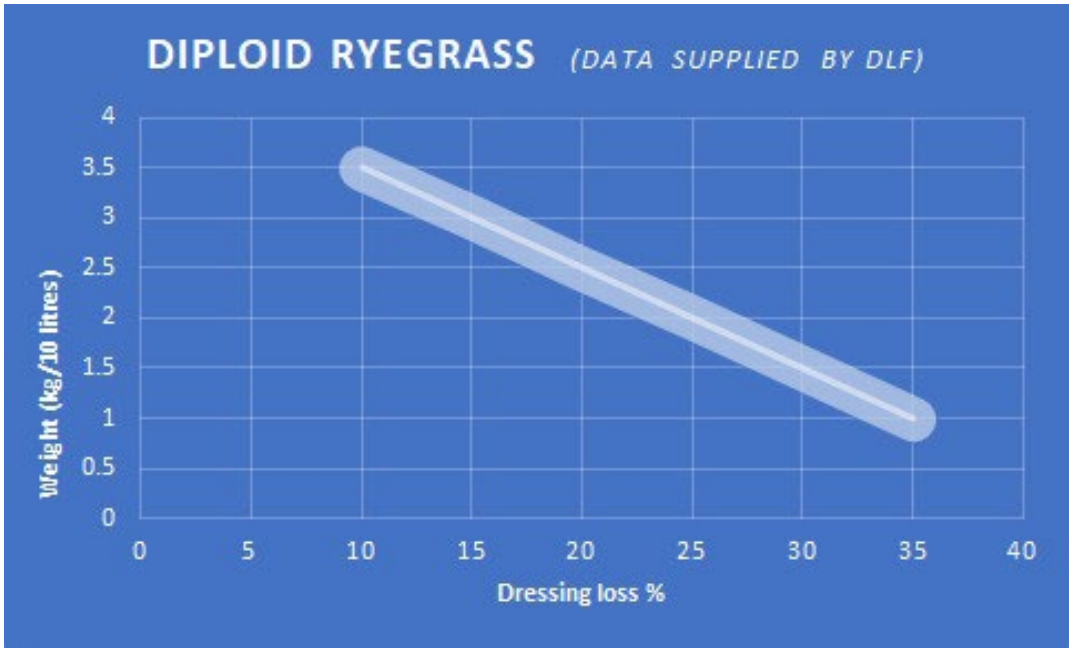
White clover seed crop desiccation

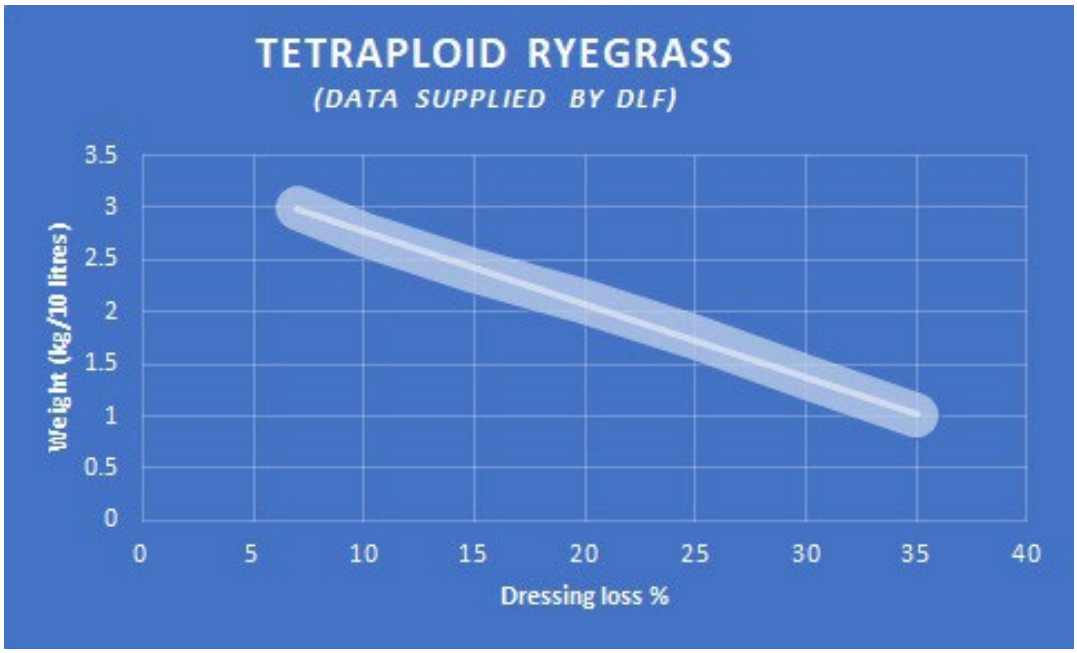
White clover seed harvest is fast approaching, and this could be a challenging year for pre-harvest desiccation. When crop biomass is high (e.g. in wetter seasons), regrowth can collapse the canopy and reduce yield. FAR has recently produced a document summarising five years of research into this topic. You can read it here. A more general discussion of clover desiccation options can be found here.

Grass seed harvest

As noted above, harvest has been and continues to be challenging for many growers. FAR has had an emphasis over the last few seasons on getting the setup of the combine right. While this is different in every situation, there are some useful points that can be applied more generally. One of these is to measure what's coming out of the combine so you can adjust settings to reduce dressing losses.

The graphs below are useful for assessing the quality of grass seed coming off the combine. These are quick and rough guides (hence the thick lines) to help determine whether a ryegrass sample contains a lot of offal. These figures are based on the grass weight in a 10-litre bucket, but can be extrapolated to a smaller bucket. If the 10 L bucket weighs less than 3 kg for diploid ryegrass then that indicates you have more than 15 % dressing losses, which is on the upper level of acceptable.





Post-harvest paddock management

If you are harvesting a ryegrass seed crop, the benefits of using the ryegrass re-growth as the basis for winter feed instead of terminating it could be maximised by over-drilling legumes. This can extend the value of the crop by providing high quality feed and reducing the N fertiliser spend for the next year. For many growers, N fertiliser account for more than 50% of farm spending, so there are plenty of reasons to reduce inputs where possible. FAR's Abie Horrocks presented some great data on this topic at our 2024 ARIA event. If you missed it, or would like to take a deeper dive into this subject, the booklet from the event can be found here (see pages 15-19).

Maize

Fall armyworm (FAW) update

Fall armyworm has been detected across multiple regions of the North Island. Most detections remain at low population levels. An exception is Northland, particularly the Far North, where high populations are present. In some crops, infestations have reached up to 50%, requiring insecticide applications. Current modelling indicates that a third generation is likely towards the end of February. This is expected to be followed closely by a short window where control is most effective, when newly emerged larvae are small and exposed on leaves, silks, and tassels. Resistance management is critical. Growers and advisers should refer to the Sparta® label and to www.fallarmyworm.nz for current guidance.

In the South Island, fall armyworm is now widespread in the Tasman and Westland regions. Infestation levels are similar to those observed in early 2023. Very late-planted crops remain at risk and should be scouted as frequently as possible to ensure economic thresholds are identified in time to act. Delayed planting increases the likelihood of overlap with later generations and higher pressure.

Alongside fall armyworm, high populations of *Helicoverpa armigera* are again being observed this season. Scouting should focus on silks, with attention given to eggs and newly hatched larvae before they move into the protected areas at the top of the cob, where control becomes more difficult.

In Northland, beneficial parasitoids are playing a clear role. Cotesia is widespread, and early laboratory rearing of collected larvae indicates parasitism rates from 30 to 40 per cent. Recent field observations by Dr Graham Walker from BSI support this, with adult Cotesia described as being as common as “flies in the outback of Australia” in maize crops across the region. These observations reinforce the importance of careful scouting and considered intervention to avoid unnecessary disruption of beneficial insects.

Current recommendations		
	Crop growth stage	**Threshold**
Maize	Seedling	≥5 % of plants are cut
	Early whorl (knee high)	≥20 % of plants are infested
	Late whorl (shoulder high)	≥40 % of plants are damaged and larvae are present
	Tasselling - early silking	≥20 % of plants are infested
Sweetcorn	Seedling	≥5 % of plants are cut
	Early whorl (knee high)	≥20 % of plants are infested
	Late whorl (shoulder high)	≥40 % of plants are damaged and larvae are present
	Tasselling - early silking	≥5 % of plants are infested

Table 1. New Zealand Fall armyworm economic thresholds. Whole-crop scouting is essential to obtain an accurate representation of infestation levels.

Oilseed rape

Post-harvest management

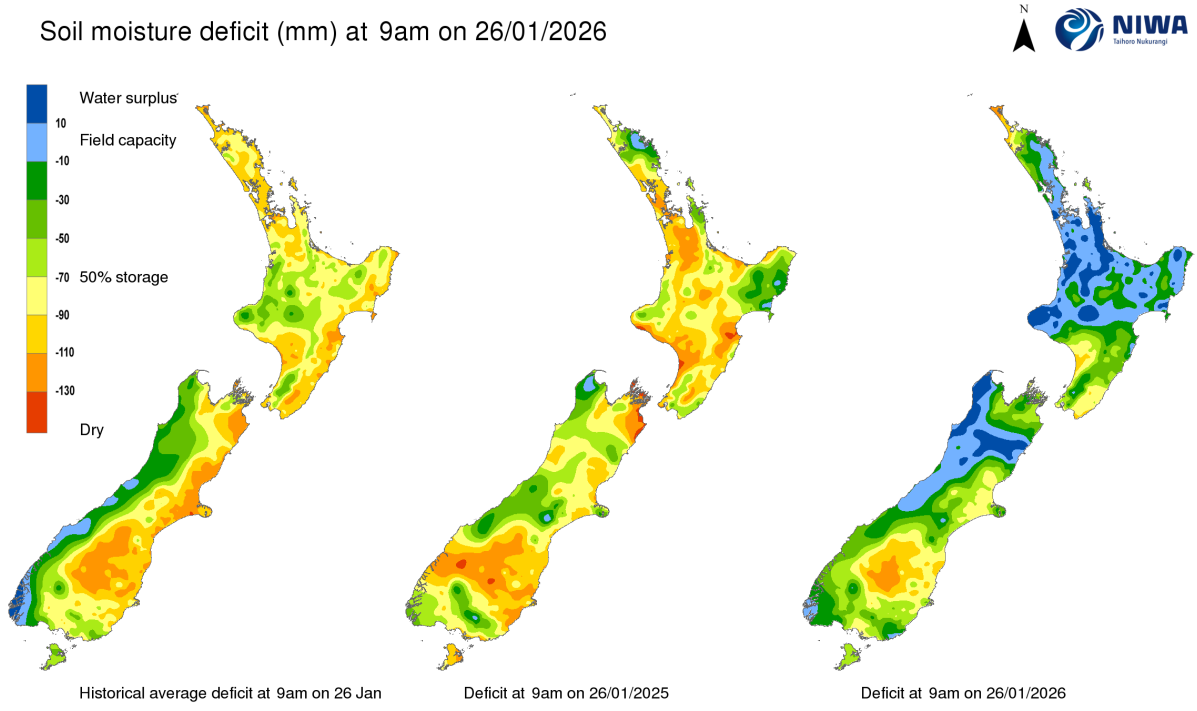
Advice from PureOil NZ for oilseed rape is that management of both the harvested seed and the paddock requires a little more care than some other crops. Some post-harvest considerations are:

- Take extra care when storing oilseed rape. Its high oil content makes controlling temperature and moisture more challenging. Aim to cool seed to less than 15°C.
- For safe storage, seed moisture should be below 8-9% for short term storage only and beyond 3–5 months 7.0–7.5% with grain temperatures maintained below 15°C.
- Be aware of the problems that oilseed rape volunteers can have in following crops, such as increased competition and reduced yield.
- Reduce the chances of shed oilseeds developing secondary dormancy by delaying tillage by 2-3 weeks post-harvest where practical.

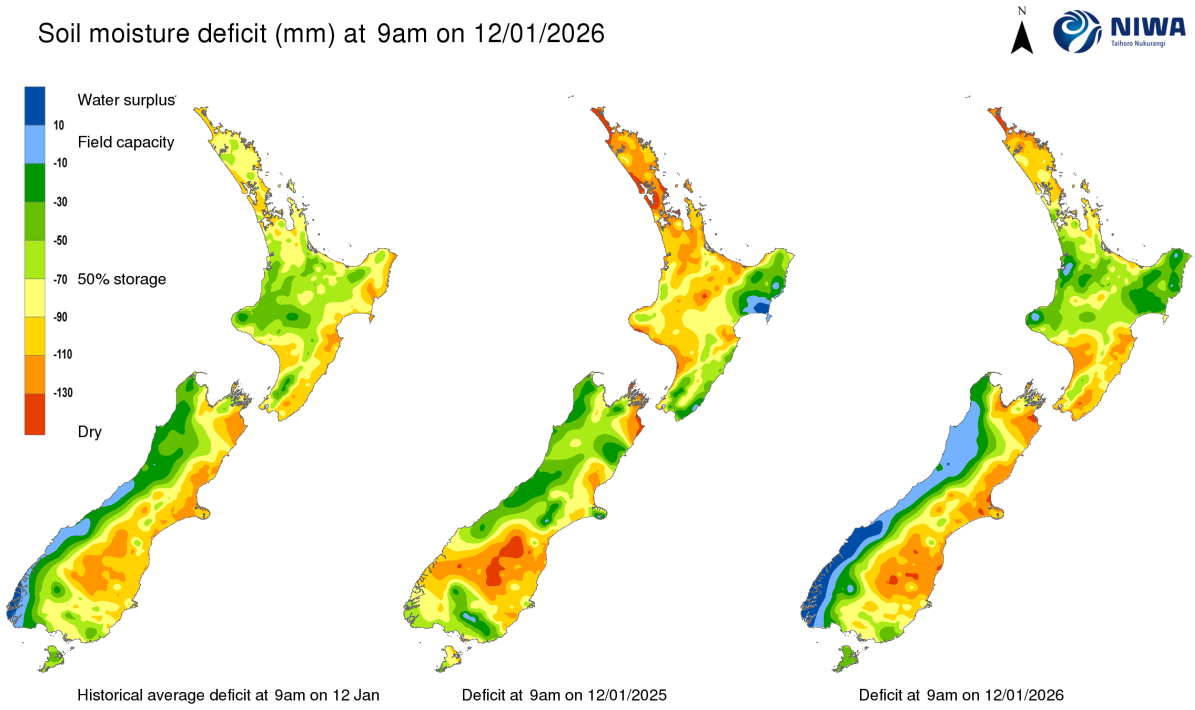
Weather Updates

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 NIWA here.



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