Crop Action

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In this issue of Crop Action:

Editor's note

The weather continues to add pressure to harvest. Around the country, a variety of crops are slowly, but steadily, coming in, although many are still feeling the effects of the wet conditions experienced in the earlier in the summer. A number of growers are reporting lower-than-anticipated yields, but are unable to identify clear causes. FAR trials have been battling with many yield-reducing challenges this season, including (but not limited to) ill-timed rain events, sprouting, take-all in cereals, and bird damage. In challenging seasons such as this one, Kiwi ingenuity often comes to the fore. Making the best of a bad situation often means making tough decisions, thinking outside the square, or both. Taking a crop for silage that you had intended to take through to grain can recoup some losses; however, if you're in this situation, please read the article below (and this one) which list some important considerations.

Harvest Snippets are continuing to come in, this link takes you to all this season's Snippets to date.

Regional updates

Southland

Harvest is well underway, with growers working to the weather windows to get through harvest. Most growers seem happy with their autumn barley. Wheat harvest has also started in some areas with "OK" yields; the full picture will be revealed over the coming weeks.

The FAR combine team were out in the south last week, running one-on-one grower visits to assist with refining combine settings. It was also good to catch up with growers at the Oat Industry day last Wednesday and see their trials first hand.

Now is a good time to get in touch if you have some ideas for the support that FAR can provide you for the next 12 months. Is there an expert you want to hear from or a topic you want to deep dive into? Give me a call to discuss. *Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator*

North Otago

Growers appear to be up to date, having capitalised on weather windows to get things done. It's been 'stop and start' through January, but growers are for more favourable weather window for late February and March. *Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Regional Facilitator*

South Canterbury

Harvest continues as weather conditions allow. Yields are variable depending on Mother Nature; some are encouraging and others are decidedly poor. Conditions are ripe for volunteers, weeds and slugs. Look into your preferred control options. Though there has been commentary about possible feed shortages, the market has not yet responded. *Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Mid Canterbury

Growers are desperate for sunshine; the number of still, drizzly days recently has made harvest a real challenge. Combines have been progressing slowly. There are many partly harvested paddocks around and driers are in hot demand. Autumn cereal crops are largely harvested but the remainder of the harvest is still to be completed. Yields have so far been average. There are many reports of grain and clover sprouting. FAR and PGGW have produced some resources to help with decision-making in wet conditions. *Cindy Lowe, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern South Island

Harvest is in full swing in the region, although weather has interrupted proceedings several times. Reports on grass seed suggest average to poor yields – largely due to the time between cutting and harvest, and the rain and regrowth which occurred while it was in the windrow.

Winter cereal yields are looking average, with some above average (which is pleasing considering the season). Clover harvest is beginning. Some crops have been badly affected by sprouting, with others reporting around average yields. *Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Eastern North Island

Our East Coast grower reports that his crops are looking amazing and the local growers have their fingers crossed that the forecast heavy weather goes around them this week.

Harvest of winter wheat is complete in Central Hawkes Bay, with some very good yields being achieved this year. Winter malt performed well and is of good quality and yield. Dryland spring wheat has not been so good, with issues around high protein and screenings. Spring barley is progressing well, with no sprouting. Peas were a mixed bag this season, slightly below average. Vegetable seed is going well, but will need some stable weather to finish off. Moisture remains good for this time of the year and autumn re-grassing programmes are well under way.

For cereal growers closer to the hills in Hawkes Bay, it has been a frustrating season, although most crops are now harvested. After very little rain through the growing season, 250mm rain damaged the quality of the winter wheat and spring barley over harvest for a lot of growers. Both crops will struggle to break even. Wheat was hit hard with sprout, and the low straw yields suggest a lack of growth. Maize is looking good.

Things are quiet in Wairarapa. A small amount of ryegrass has been harvested with good results. Cereal harvest has just begun and initial results look to be slightly above average. Maize is looking good and has had plenty of moisture; as in the Horowhenua region, it needs some heat to finish off.

Despite some dry spells earlier in the Tararua region, good regular rains since Christmas have resurrected moisture deficient maize crops and they are performing better than expected. Some of crops that were impacted by cutworm earlier in the season will fail to reach their potential. *Megan Cushnahan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Southwest North Island

Consistently good growing conditions in the Rangitikei have growers smiling. Barley and wheat harvest has just started. Disease pressure has been fairly low despite the moisture and crops are a week or two later harvesting, which is a good sign. Maize crops are looking above average at this stage. They had good moisture at flowering, but some rust has crept in recently. No reports of significant Northern Leaf Blight yet. A lot of diamond back moth was reported on green feed crops over the Christmas/New Year period.

Manawatu crops are looking pretty good and moisture with moisture arrive as needed. Wheat is starting to change colour and has progressed very well. Harvest isn't far away.

Maize crops have enjoyed good moisture all the way through the season and despite wet planting conditions, the moisture that followed kept the soil surface soft, so germination was still good. Strip-tilled maize crops have done well; one grower commented that the paddock that he double strip-tilled was performing very well and it seemed to make a difference in terms of germination. Some of the maize around the Horowhenua district is shorter than usual so it will be interesting to see how yield might be impacted as they look otherwise healthy. Some of the crops in elevated areas are still recovering from wind damage earlier in the season. *Megan Cushnahan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern North Island

Focus is primarily on harvest readiness and getting grass back into the ground post-harvest. Growers and dairy farmers should be thinking about their re-grassing plan and ordering grass packs early, as there could be some seed shortages as a result of the Canterbury harvest issues.

Growers are starting to think about next season's crop, with pre-emergence soil emergence being a hot topic of discussion. Establishment costs/ha have risen, so doing the basics well is important.

While rain has been regular there is not a large amount of Northern Leaf Blight around, crops have been rust-affected but no reports of high crop damage. *Rachel Mudge, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Crop management

General

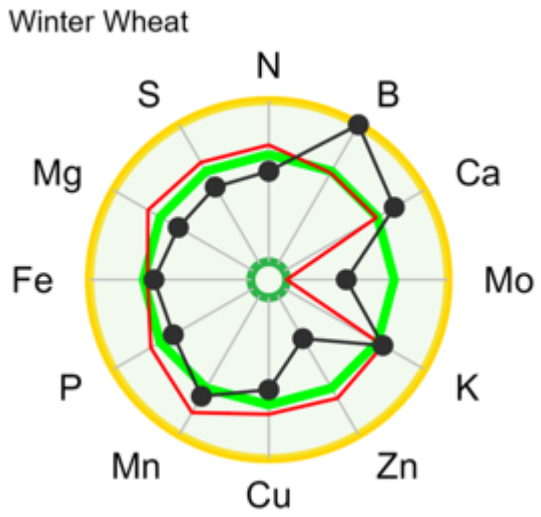
Plant-back issues after herbicides

Hail and other weather issues are resulting in some growers are harvesting cereals (and, maybe, other crops) as silage, rather than grain. If this is something you are considering, keep in mind that these paddocks will be turned around more quickly than originally planned and that this earlier planting could lead to herbicide residues having a greater effect on the new crop. Brassicas in particular can be susceptible to such effects. Check your spray diary and consult your agrichemical company representative or agronomist for further information.

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 (black dot 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 here, or contact donna.lill@FAR.org.nz for more information.



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. 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. The photos below were all taken within a month of a previous inspection, and highlight how quickly problems can develop, even when gauges are inspected regularly.

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. If you suspect your readings are still inaccurate, contact your service provider, they may be able to test or recalibrate the gauge to ensure it is working correctly.

Cereals

Aphids and YDV

Following a number of queries about potential links around some poor cereal yields and Yellow Dwarf Virus (YDV), FAR has DNA tested leaf material from monitored cereal crops to determine the level of YDV infection present. We're still waiting on those results. However, it has been a challenging season, and a range of factors, including nutrient deficiencies, environmental stress, or other diseases can produce similar effects and may be contributing to reduced crop performance. Aphid transmission occurring after GS 32 is generally not considered to be strongly yield-limiting, however, visible YDV symptoms (which may be most prevalent along paddock edges etc.) may not appear until weeks or even months after infection. A FAR study supporting this can be found on p97 of FAR's Annual Research Report 2020/2021.

A relatively mild winter may have supported larger populations of wingless aphids which can contribute to secondary spread of YDV once colonies establish. While wingless aphids are not shown in Aphid Chat graphs, they discussed in the reports. In-field monitoring is always the best way to keep on top of secondary spread of aphids in your crop and provides an understanding of whether beneficial insects are in sufficiently healthy numbers to provide a free service. Information on how to do this moving into autumn can be found here.

Cereal silage and fungicide withholding periods

Withholding periods are another thing to consider if you are harvesting crops as silage instead of grain. With standard crop and harvest management, there should be little risk of harvesting within the withholding periods listed for autumn sown crops. However, harvesting early could put some crops at risk of not meeting the withholding periods from a GS 39-49 application of some fungicides. Check your application dates and calculate whether your crop is safe to sell, and in what capacity.

Spring sown crops will generally have a shorter window from GS 39 to harvest, so extra care should be taken to ensure withholding periods are met. Withholding periods for common fungicide products used for cereal silage and grain production are listed below.

Table 1. Withholding periods for common fungicide products used for cereal silage and grain production. Note that several generic products are available for many of these active ingredients. (Table updated February 2026)

Product	Active Ingredients	Withholding period for forage/silage	Withholding period for grain
Amistar®	Azoxystrobin	28 days	35 days
Aviator Xpro®	Bixafen + Prothioconazole	42 days	56 days
Bolide®	Epoxiconazole + Prochloraz	42 days	42 days
Caley® Iblon®	Isoflucypram + Prothioconazole	42 days (Barley); 28 days (Wheat)	56 days (Barley); 42 days (Wheat)
Comet®	Pyraclostrobin	28 days	56 days
Elatus® Plus	Benzovindiflupyr	28 days (Wheat only)	42 days (Wheat only)
Folicur® SC	Tebuconazole	28 days	49 days
Miravis® Flexi	Pydiflumetofen	28 days	42 days
Opus®	Epoxiconazole	42 days	42 days

Proline®	**Prothioconazole**	**42 days**	**56 days**
Prosaro®	Prothioconazole + Tebuconazole	42 days	56 days
Protek®	Carbendazim	None	60 days
Questar®	Fenpicoxamid	28 days	None when used as directed
Revylution®	Mefenitrifluconazole	28 days	35 days
Revystar®	Mefenitrifluconazole + Fluxapyroxad	28 days	35 days
Questar™	fenpicoxamid	28 days	None when used as directed
Seguris® Flexi	Isopyrazam	28 days	42 days
Systiva®	Fluxapyroxad	42 days	42 days
Vimoy® Iblon®	Isoflucypram	42 days (Barley); 28 days (Wheat)	56 days (Barley); 42 days (Wheat)

Herbage

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-sowing 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 accounts 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).

White clover seed crop desiccation

White clover seed harvest is getting underway and it is a challenging year for pre-harvest desiccation. FAR has recently summarised five years of research into this topic. You can read it here. A more general discussion of clover desiccation options can be found here.

Maize

Fall armyworm update

Significant FAW populations are present in several areas, especially in Northland, where infestations of up to 50% have required insecticide treatment and further FAW moth flights have been recorded across New Zealand over the past two weeks.

In Far North Northland, a distinct and large flight likely marks the start of the third generation. In most other regions, flights remain smaller and more frequent. In many areas, FAW caterpillar numbers and sizes vary widely within paddocks, which makes generation changes difficult to define. Traps indicate adult activity, but they are not a decision tool. Direct crop scouting across the whole paddock remains essential.

In Westland, FAW levels are similar to the 2022/23 season. However, the risk they pose is higher this year due to poor spring weather and delayed planting. Other regions also report replanting or late establishment extending into late 2025. These later crops require close and frequent checks.

In the Waikato and Auckland regions, smaller populations of FAW appear to be suppressed by natural parasitism. In general, crops in these areas have responded well to favourable growing conditions, and a recent Farmers Weekly article suggests pre-harvest assessments show above-average yields for both silage and grain across the country.

Visible FAW damage can draw attention, but it may not represent the true risk across the crop. A short, systematic walk through the paddock can prevent unnecessary costs. Thirty minutes of careful scouting once a week may save thousands in chemical and application expenses. In the event of spraying being required, monitoring before and after treatment is critical to confirm control. Chemical use can disrupt ecological balance and may allow secondary pests, such as cosmopolitan armyworm, to increase rapidly.

Across the country, there are also large populations of cosmopolitan armyworm and corn earworm. Cosmopolitan armyworm *(Mythimna separata)* is a severe foliar feeder and can strip leaves quickly. Corn earworm *(Helicoverpa armigera)* can damage silks and kernels with little visible sign until yield loss has occurred.

Communication remains important for decision making. Speak with advisers and neighbours, and share observations and outcomes. For example, recently monitoring showed a late-planted West Coast crop nearing the 20% damage threshold and chemical control was being considered. Several life stages were present and field inspection showed that fewer than half the larvae were small enough for treatment to be effective, while most of the others were large and protected within the whorl. In this case, spraying was unlikely to provide benefit. Timing is critical, and informed decisions depend on regular scouting and discussion.

Visit www.fallarmyworm.nz for the latest updates and information regarding FAW in maize and sweetcorn.

Maize silage

Optimal harvest timing and ensiling means optimal silage quality which contributes, in turn, to maximising milk or meat production. For optimal feed quality maize silage is typically harvested between 32 and 38 % whole plant dry matter (WPDM). Depending on your crop characteristics, feed quality expectations and practical situation, the achieved WPDM% of your maize crop will likely vary. Once the maize is harvested make sure it is well consolidated within the bunker of the stack. This will maximise silage quality and minimise dry matter losses.

For detailed information on when to harvest your maize for silage, managing crop variability, ensiling best practice, and the role of silage inoculants, visit:

- Pioneer maize silage resource page
- Corson Maize: Maize Silage Best Practice
- X121: The role of silage inoculants

For those trading maize silage, to ensure the outcome is fair for both parties we encourage you to visit FAR's Good practice guide for maize forage trading.

This page provides links to the 2024 Good Practice Guide, as well as the Maize Forage Purchase Contract 2024. Note that MBIE is currently reviewing Section 2.0 of the Good Practice Guide to ensure it is up to date with the current requirements and updated department details.

Weather Updates

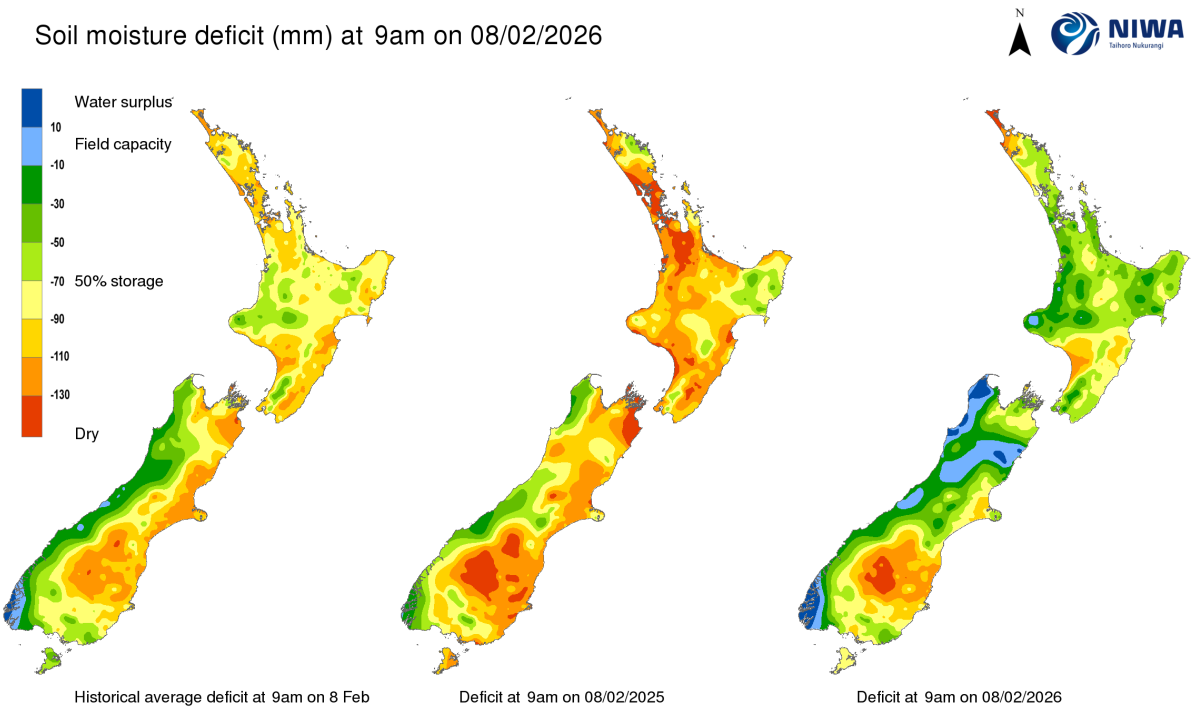
Long-term weather outlook

According to the long-term climate outlook from NIWA, winds from the east will predominate from February through until the end of April. February is expected to be more settled, although, as always, short periods of unsettled weather may occur. The tropical cyclone season has been quiet so far, but, NIWA notes, the highest risk period is late summer/early autumn. Temperatures for the next few months should be around average for the time of year, except for in the north of the North Island, where they will most likely be above average. The lower North Island is about equally likely to experience average or above average temperatures. Rainfall totals are likely to be above normal in the main arable areas of New Zealand, although in the east of the South Island and the west of the North Island, they are equally likely to be near normal.

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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