Crop Action

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Editor's note

As harvest wraps up for many growers, there is a strong focus on making sense of what has been a very challenging season for some - both in the paddock and across supply chains.

FAR's annual Autumn Round Up events for those in the South Island and lower North Island begin this week. Details for each regional event (including several virtual sessions) are available on FAR's events page.

Our staff and guest speakers will reflect on how the season may have influenced key decisions such as fertiliser management, aphid control, pea disease management and when to pull the trigger on ryegrass seed cutting and harvest. They will also provide insights on upcoming agronomic priorities, including autumn grass weed management in cereals and maize harvest following the recent challenging weather.

We hope to see you there to share experiences and chew the fat on these topics and more.

Regional Updates

Southland

The return of dewy mornings and a few frosts have signalled the arrival of autumn conditions. A few stints of sunny days are required to get through the remainder of harvest.

Harvest is progressing well; there is still some autumn sown wheat remaining to be harvested and spring cereals are still a few weeks from being ready. Growers are reporting some good, to slightly above average yields. *Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator*

South Canterbury/North Otago

Thank you to those growers who joined us at the FAR Shout last week. It was great to see so many of you off the farm for a chat with your farming colleagues. Reflecting on harvest 2026, many commented that it was a middling harvest – not bad comparable to mid-Canterbury but not their greatest ever harvest either. The main points of discussion were wins of harvest 2026 and how the US/Iran war may impact the primary sector in New Zealand. Some crop residue burning is underway; if you are planning on a crop residue burn in the near future, please visit www.checkitsalright.nz for the latest on the fire season. *Philippa Rawlinson, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Mid Canterbury

A welcome run of hot, dry weather last week has allowed growers to make good progress with harvesting after a stop–start period through late summer. Most crops are now off, although there are

still some paddocks to finish, particularly closer to the foothills where conditions have remained cooler and wetter. In many cases, later-planted crops have actually benefited from the delayed season.

Vegetable seed crops are now approaching the bird-netting stage and, overall, are looking reasonably good. However, some growers have reported patchy pollination, likely linked to the unsettled weather earlier in the season.

Growers are turning their attention to next season. Planning is well underway, with decisions being made around crop rotations and planting options for the coming year. Ground preparation has started and autumn sowing has begun where soil conditions allow. *Cindy Lowe, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern South Island

Harvest is 80% complete, with growers up to date and taking advantage of the weather windows as they come to finish off spring crops over the next month. Due to the ongoing wet weather over harvest, growers have dried the majority of the grain and seed they have harvested this season adding extra cost, work and complication to an already busy spot.

Yield reports, for those not affected by hail, are continuing to be around average for most crop types. Some grain and seed quality issues have been seen, with sprouting being identified in cereals and clover particularly.

Growers are turning paddocks around for planting of autumn crops and winter feed with the clearer weather allowing for stubble burning and cultivation to been done in a timely fashion. As herbicide resistance is an increasing issue in the region this is a good time for growers to think about any weeds they saw during harvest and making long term decisions to reduce the chance of these becoming a seed burden. Tools may include rotation, cultivation/stale seed beds and use of pre and post emerge herbicides. Approach FAR staff or industry reps for support if you have any areas of concern.

Autumn fertiliser programmes are underway for ex-ryegrass seed and earlier planted winter feed crops. Lambs are beginning to arrive on farm with strong prices being paid for stores. *Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Southwest North Island

Wheat harvest is underway in the region. Some growers managed to harvest their wheat before the storm, however those whose wheat wasn't ready before the storm say they are struggling to get it dry now. Short day length, quite high humidity and dull days are not helping. Overall yields have been good despite the very fast early growth, late spring/early summer and the storm damage. Unfortunately, some growers' wheat crops suffered in the storm, with grain being shaken out by the high winds. Good ground conditions are making cutting of brackled crops short a lot less troublesome than it might otherwise be. There has been strong demand for straw this year, which is raising growers' spirits. Another bright spot has been barley, with growers reporting that yields are slightly above average this season.

Many maize growers in the region have had crops seriously impacted by the high winds in the recent storm and the growers with downed crops will need to decide soon whether they harvest for silage or take it through to grain. Some of the shorter hybrids are coming into the half starch window and will be suitable to take as silage. *Megan Cushanhan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Hawkes Bay

We have had a great few days weather to harvest this week in Hawkes Bay. Oats were harvested in February and it was an average to slightly below average yield across most areas. Maize is looking good in all areas and some growers have started harvesting for silage. Grain maize growers are hoping for some more heat – the maize is starting to turn and there seems to be some demand for early grain. Growers have just harvested red clover in Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa last week and the growers are happy with its performance. *Megan Cushanhan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Wairarapa

It's been a frustrating week for growers, with showers hampering efforts to harvest cereals. Growers report the quality of cereals remains okay, but they are very broken down making them challenging to harvest. Growers have started harvesting silage maize and other crops are looking good. *Megan Cushanhan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern North Island

It is a happy maize silage harvest time in the Northern North Island.

There are many silage crops off now and in the stack, with ground now being prepared to go back into the grass part of the rotation. With the dairy industry focusing in on home grown feed, this is positive for the industry in many ways. Some growers are reporting record yields, which helps when competing with imported feed. Despite the challenging spring planting conditions, the regular summer rainfall and good temperatures have produced large cobs, with good dry matter and overall good quality.

The healthy milk price is helping the positive outlook for maize planting in the future, but there is an eye on increasing costs of growing the crop. As it is, it is working, but several growers are concerned about the input costs under inflationary pressure.

Growers do have questions around growing crops that can sustain yields in increasingly volatile weather. Many missed the high winds but have neighbours whose crops have suffered damage. *Rachel Mudge, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Knapdale research hub update

The risk of growing maize in the deep south has been realised at the FAR Knapdale research site, 13 km North of Gore. The project encompasses two different farm management practices similar to the Chertsey future farm trial in Mid Canterbury. The conventional and future blocks were planted in Pioneer P7364 November (8th Conventional block and 14th Future block) by conventional cultivation (conventional block) and powered strip-till cultivation in the future block.

The crop was looking excellent in both paddocks from planting until early March. A frost event was recorded in the Southland region including Knapdale on Tuesday the 3rd March where temperatures stayed below zero for a five-hour period from 4-8 am (ranging between -0.1 to -1.4 °c). Significant damage resulted from the frost event at the research site which was intensified by the duration of the time the air temperature stayed below zero. Figures below show the extent of the damage. Figure 1 highlights the increased damage to the outside of the paddock compared to within in Figure 2. Figure 3 displays the level of damage down the plant with leaves showing signs of damage down to the primary cob on the plant. Time will tell what the actual extent of damage to the crop will be.

Figure 1. Knapdale hub conventional maize after frost event recorded on 3 March 2026, in the Southland region.

Figure 2. Inside the trial area showing the level of chlorosis in the upper canopy after a frost event was recorded on 3 March 2026 at the Knapdale hub research site.

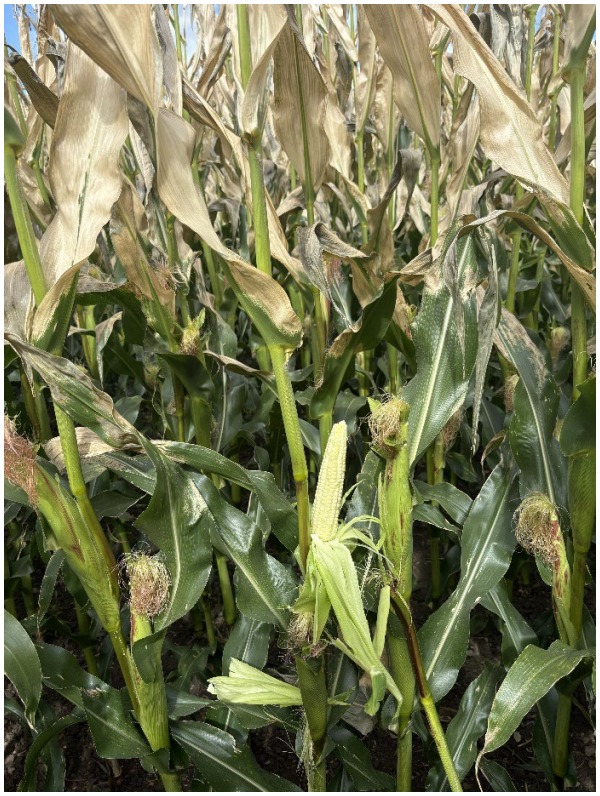


Figure 3. Damage done to maize crop following a frost event on 3 March 2026. Photo looking down the rows at the Knapdale research site in Southland.

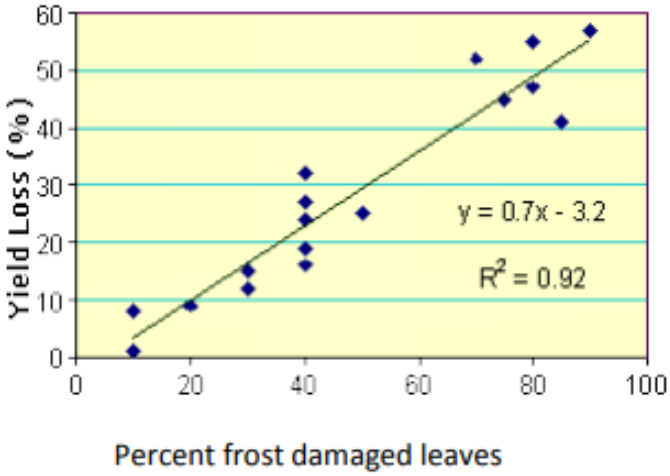


Figure 4. Yield loss for maize when frost damage occurs at the 7 to 10 leaf collar stage of maturity (Carter, 1995).

Research conducted in Wisconsin in 1992 by Carter (1995) showed varying degrees of grain yield loss following a damaging frost to maize stands between nine to 12 emerged leaves (four to seven emerged collars) as per figure 4. The maize in Southland is destined for silage and not grain and was more mature at time of injury at R2-R3 growth stage. Early indications predict yield losses in the range of 15-20% if conditions remain satisfactory until harvest in April (however little is known on the extent of damage following late season frosts in New Zealand).

Key things to note if your crop has been frosted

- It can take two days after the frost for the damage to become evident and after three to five days the plant should show signs of recovering.
- Take note of where the damage is within the crop. Look for green leaf at or above the primary cob level.
- Assess all areas of the paddock; low areas may be hit harder due to cool air pooling in depressions.
- Talk to your crop rep for further advice on the damage and effects on yield or harvest.

FAR extends its thoughts to all growers who may have been affected by the recent frost event.

References: Carter, P.R. 1995. Late spring frost and post-frost clipping effect on corn growth and yield. J. Prod. Agric. 8:203-209.

Crop management

General

Grass grub

There will be extra attention on grass grub this year as the chemical control methods that growers have relied on in the past are no longer available. At this time of the year, the grubs are approaching their 3rd instar stage. The number of biological alternatives (such as BioShield®) is limited.

Cultivation will have limited effect on grub numbers at this stage in their life cycle. This is because 2nd and 3rd instar need living roots to mature, so while a fallow will put a hold on grass grub development it will not kill them. Sacrificial crops are a good idea to limit damage in your main crop.

Changes to hemp growing regulations

On the 11 December, the Ministry for Regulation announced a new regulatory framework for industrial hemp (iHemp).

The main point for growers to note is that you will no longer need a licence to grow low THC industrial hemp; you will only need to notify Police and MPI of your intention. Ministry of Health are working on the changes to the industrial hemp regulations 2006 and the new framework will be announced in a few months, in time for the 2026/2027 growing season. (Note that hemp is usually plant in October-November in New Zealand.)

MOH have provided some guidance on the key changes here, but if you have any questions or feedback, please contact admin@nzhia.com for more information.

Setting up for autumn weed management

With the continued threat of herbicide-resistant weeds (especially to Group 2 post-emergence herbicides), pre-emergence herbicides become vital to the continued profitability of arable systems. Sakura® (a.i. pyroxasulfone, Group 15) is commonly used for pre-emergent grass weed control in cereals and other crops, but needs to be washed in by at least 10 mm (but preferably 15-25 mm) of rainfall or irrigation to be most effective (Read more here.) In planning for autumn plantings this coming season, there are some considerations:

- Rainfall this autumn across the country is predicted to be close to historical averages, which is good news, but monitor how much rainfall/irrigation goes on through that period so you can avoid nasty surprises later on.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that including Avadex™ (a.i. tri-allate, Group 15) as an incorporated, pre-planting herbicide, can “buy time” for the Sakura® and improve efficacy on some grass weeds in dry seasons.
- Monitor the crop for escapes and have a plan for what to do if these are significant, either by rogueing, or by using an appropriate post-emergence herbicide. Some growers have been trialling tine weeding recently, with good results.
- Remember that, even in dry seasons, many pre-emergence herbicides can remain in the soil and be effective later in the season on later weed flushes that come once soil moisture levels return to normal.

Further resources:

- Integrated Weed Management
- Herbicide Screening Trial Results
- Management of ryegrass weeds

Autumn irrigation management

Autumn can be a tricky time to get your irrigation right. Setting up moisture sensors as soon as possible after a crop is sown is a good idea and can give insights into how your irrigation is impacting soil moisture and crop development.

Irrigation is important for the developing crop, but be aware of the following issues:

- Irrigation can lower soil temperatures, possibly slowing growth rates.
- Over-watering a crop early can disincentivise a crop from developing deep roots, which can cause problems later in the season, especially if there is water stress.
- Never fill the profile, as this can lead to nutrient loss and is a waste of resources; always leave space for any rain event to fill any gaps.
- More information on this topic can be found on p32 of 2024's issue of FAR's *From the Ground Up* publication.

Cereals

Autumn planting

Sowing time is fast approaching for autumn wheat – in fact there may be some brave souls who are sowing this month! However, for most growers April is the preferred sowing window, or even May in some cases. Last season weather conditions forced many growers to sow later than was optimal; we will be hoping for better conditions this season. Remember, however, that earlier-sown cereals are more vulnerable to YDV-induced yield losses. While this is not usually an issue, and can be mitigated with insecticides, we did (possibly) have a season last year with higher than usual aphid numbers, so it's worth considering.

Some growers may still be considering which cultivar(s) to plant. FAR's annual cereal Cultivar Performance Trials (CPT) are a valuable source of information when thinking about this issue. A lot of information from these trials is now available on the FAR website, which can be accessed here. You can also access the full booklet of results for last season's trials here.

Pest control in stored grain

Silos around the country are beginning to fill up. Pests are always a concern for stored grain, as some of the chemical control options can be toxic and, in some years, hard to come by. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques such as storage hygiene can go a long way to controlling grain storage pests without the use of chemicals, so consider the following when setting up your silo to store grain.

- Ensure the grain store is clean before filling with grain. Many grain storage pests are very small and can survive in pockets of spilled grain or residue from the previous season.
- Once the grain is in storage, keep it cool and dry. If grain is harvested at high temperature, it can quickly increase by 10-15°C once inside storage, so cooling it is a priority. Likewise, if grain is harvested at high moisture content, it may need to be dried to prevent the risk of insect infestation and fungal development.
- Monitor temperature and moisture in the silo regularly; an increase in temperature and/or moisture can indicate a pest infestation.
- If you do require a grain storage product, there are a few that do not contain pirimiphos-methyl such as Fyfanon® a.i. 440 g/L maldison (Group 1B) and Silo® Eco a.i. 90% diatomaceous earth. Both of these products are grain protectants.

For more information:

- The drying and storage of grain and herbage seeds book (2025)
- Arable Update 210 and Arable Update 211.
- An up-to-date list of stored grain insecticide treatments can be found here.

Herbage

Vulpia hairgrass management in ryegrass seed crops

Autumn planting of ryegrass seed crops will be happening soon on many farms (or has started already), and one of the most problematic weeds that can be found in many of these crops is Vulpia hairgrass (Vulpia bromoides and Vulpia myuros). Once the weed becomes established in a crop, there are few options available, so getting your herbicide programme right from the start is crucial.

- FAR trials have consistently found that Nortron® (ethofumesate, Group 15) applied pre-emergence is more effective at 4 L/ha than at 2 L/ha.
- Quantum® (DFF, Group 12) can be added pre-emergence at 100 mL/ha to improve control. Some crop damage may be observed in some cases, although the crop should recover.
- In FAR trials, Vulpia control (and seed yield) was improved with a post-emergence herbicide following Nortron® at 4 L/ha pre-emergence. Again, going early is important (FAR trials applied herbicides at GS21-22 of the crop). Isoproturon (IPU, multiple formulations, Group 5) and atrazine (Group 5) are possible options.
- Prominent® (prometryn, Group 5) has been included in several FAR trials over the last few years. This should generally be applied later (GS24 of the crop) and has given good results in most trials. Some crop damage has been observed in some trials and it is not yet clear the conditions that are leading to this.
- If you are grazing your crop, be aware of possible loss of biomass with some herbicides, as well as withholding periods.
- Always read the label of any agrichemical product before use, and if in doubt, contact your agronomist or industry rep.

Maize

Harvesting lodged maize

Some North Island growers may still be dealing with the aftermath of last month's storms, which were reported to have caused lodging in many affected maize crops. An online resource has been prepared by FAR's Technology Manager, Chris Smith, to assist growers in dealing with harvesting lodged maize, whether for silage or for grain. Read it here.

Weather Updates

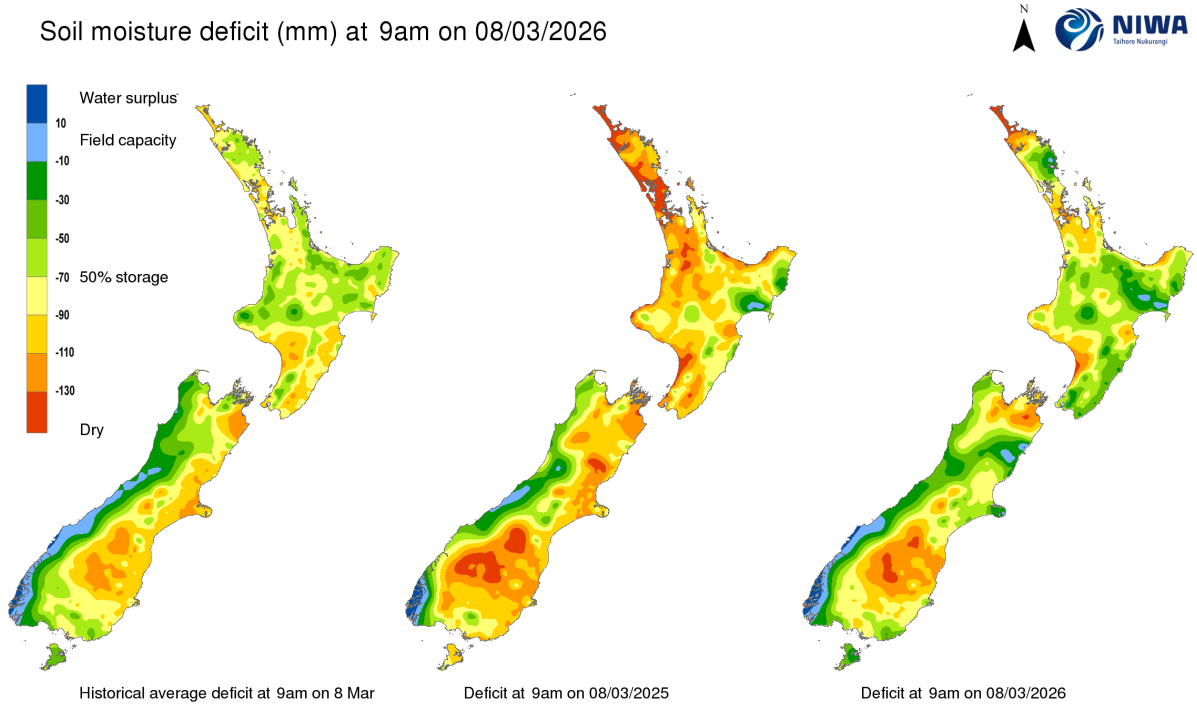
Long-term weather outlook

According to the NIWA outlook for March to May, weather coming from the easterly quarter will continue to predominate. There is also a heightened risk of tropical incursions bringing unsettled weather, especially for the North Island, but with periods of better weather between these. Towards the end of the three-month period, the system will shift so that the predominant source of New Zealand's weather is from the north. Air temperatures should be close to the historical average for most arable regions of the country, except for the north and west of the North Island, where they are expected to above average. The same area is expected to have above average rainfall, while near normal rainfall is expected everywhere else.

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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