Crop Action

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In this issue of Crop Action:

Editor's note

Another season and other challenge...this time last year many growers were dealing with flooding, this year, and autumn so far has been considerably drier for many and some Canterbury growers are starting irrigators up for earlier sown autumn crops.

Slug pressure can be lower when conditions are dry, but we are still observing strong grass grub pressure on new sowings (exacerbated, of course, by restricted access to chemical control methods). Some pre-emergence herbicides are also less effective when rainfall is inadequate to wash them in.

This creates challenges. Remember, though, if you ever need to talk about things, there are multiple avenues where folks are more than happy to have a yarn. A good place to start, or to know about so you can tell your mates about it, is the Lean on a Gate website.

Chertsey arable site

Harvest is now complete at the Chertsey arable site. The Ministry for the Environment maize nitrogen trial was harvested on 15 April, with yields ranging from 21 t/ha (no applied N) to 24 t/ha (optimum N; 170 kg N applied).

Ground preparation and autumn sowing have been the primary focus over the past month. The site is looking good. Post-emergence herbicide strategies are currently being discussed for herbage trials. See below a list of trials established to date.

- CPT demonstration
- Wheat bio-pesticide trial
- Barley row spacing and plant population trial
- Ryegrass genotypes trial
- White clover harvest timing trial
- Long-term establishment trial
- Autumn linseed plant population trial
- Ryegrass stem rust trial
- Future Farm demonstration
- Tall fescue irrigation trial

The white clover harvest timing trial received 1 L/ha Headstart® (50 g/L flumetsulam, Group 2) in early March and will receive 400 mL/ha Equate® (240 g/L imazethapyr, Group 2) during the week of 11 May to control a range of broadleaf weeds. Field pansy (*Viola arvensis*) will need to be monitored, with a follow-up application of Argosy® (25 g/L diflufenican, Group 12 + 250 g/L bromoxynil, Group 6) + Pasture-Kleen™ (680 g/L 2,4-D, Group 4) planned in the coming months when required.

Broadleaf weeds, particularly speedwell (*Veronica persica*), are becoming an issue in the ryegrass genotypes and tall fescue trials. An application of 1.75 L/ha Nufarm Image® (120 g/L bromoxynil, Group 6 + 120 g/L ioxynil, Group 6 + 360 g/L mecoprop-P, Group 4) is scheduled for next week.

Grass grub (*Costelytra zealandica*) damage is becoming evident in the tall fescue irrigation trial too. The area was planted in late February following rotary-hoe cultivation in November and early February. Insecticides Diazinon 20G (200 g/kg diazinon) and SuSCon® Green (100 g/kg chlorpyrifos – no longer available) were applied at sowing. This highlights the need for new control options as existing tools are phased out. FAR is currently investigating bio-pesticide alternatives in collaboration with Midlands Seeds and the Bioeconomy Science Institute, with a bio-pesticide trial established at the Chertsey Site to continue the work currently done by FAR to evaluate potential biological control options.

Work this week has shifted to preparing the CROPS field day sponsor blocks' area for planting. Please note the CROPS field day is on **25 November 2026** this year. Lock the date into your calendars to view and hear about the latest FAR trials and research.

Kowhai Farm

As with Chertsey, harvest has now been completed at Kowhai Farm. Last season, the majority of the site was planted in winter barley (cv. SY Transformer). The season was challenging, with significant rainfall events in April 2025 impacting crop performance through to harvest. Yields were below average, with a site mean of 6 t/ha (3 ha dryland and 2 ha irrigated).

Favourable autumn conditions have allowed good progress with cultivation and sowing this season. The following trials are currently established:

- Tall fescue post-harvest management trial
- Long-term fence line management trial
- Prometryn crop safety in perennial forage and turf ryegrass
- Ryegrass row spacing and plant population (crop competition) trial
- Wheat variety crop competition and herbicide trial
- Intermediate wheatgrass demonstration
- SIRC Prairie grass head smut control trial
- Spring trials planned for the site include a maize herbicide screening trial, along with Lincoln University trials on a leased portion of the site.

Broadleaf weed control has been the primary focus in the ryegrass and prairie grass trials. Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis*) is the dominant weed, with smaller populations of wireweed (*Polygonum aviculare*), speedwell (*Veronica persica*), storksbill (*Erodium cicutarium*), and field pansy (*Viola arvensis*) present in some areas.

Trimec® (18.7 g/L dicamba, Group 4, 600 g/L mecoprop, Group4, and 150 g/L MCPA, Group 4) has been applied to the prairie grass trial, following a pre-emergence application of 0.5 L/ha Firebird® (400 g/L flufenacet, Group 15 + 200 g/L diflufenican, Group 12).

The ryegrass trials were planted later than planned and are now approaching growth stage GS 13. The prometryn crop safety trial is scheduled to receive 1.75 L/ha Nufarm Image® next week, subject to suitable conditions.

The majority of the site (7 ha) has been sown in a winter faba bean cover crop. The plan is to establish a spring linseed crop following the faba beans. As the site has been predominantly in cereal crops over recent seasons, linseed has been selected to provide alternative weed control options and help break the take-all (*Gaeumannomyces graminis var. tritici, Ggt*) cycle.

Regional Updates

South Otago/Southland

The south has been enjoying some great autumn conditions. Harvest is nearly all wrapped up for another year. Autumn planting is well underway and going well other than a few problematic Slugs.

Early sown cereals are approaching GS 21. With the warmer weather, growers are considering whether or not to apply a foliar insecticide to manage aphid populations.

FAR have partnered with Beef + Lamb to deliver a Wormwise workshop for growers running livestock in their system. Join us in Winton on the 9th of June; more details to come! *Nicole Foote, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Mid Canterbury

The last three weeks of dry, warm weather have been welcome allowing most harvest to wrap up and autumn planting to progress (maize harvest still underway). Some growers are turning irrigation back on to help autumn-sown crops establish. Weed control is also front of mind; warm conditions make this an ideal time to walk crops, check establishment, and keep an eye out for any emerging issues. Pre- and post-emergence herbicides are being applied, and stock are starting to arrive on farm as the season shifts gears. It is also a busy time for planning and decision-making, as growers juggle autumn crop establishment, grazing, weed control and next season's rotations.

A reminder to check out the ***Tennis for Farmers*** event at the Ashburton Trust Tennis Centre on Sunday 17 May, 3–7pm. All abilities welcome for an afternoon of social tennis, followed by a BBQ dinner and guest speakers Doug Avery, Dan Smith and Cole Groves. A great chance to get off farm, catch up with others and hear from some excellent speakers. *Cindy Lowe, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern South Island

Harvest is 95% finished in the region, but still hanging on for a few growers with maize, vegetable seeds or crops which required replanting due to the wet spring. Yield reports are varied across all crops, but for many growers the overall results of the harvest will be average. As suspected due to the dull and wet summer and harvest weather we are hearing reports of a number of cereal crops not meeting milling or malting specifications.

The settled and dry weather of the last two weeks has made for good cultivation and drilling conditions. Autumn cereal planting is progressing smoothly although growers are still waiting on contract pricing. Growers are reminded of FAR's Gross Margin and Overhead costs spreadsheets which can help them understand the costs associated with growing individual crops. Also, this calculator helps you find the per hectare costs of overheads to your business which should be deducted from the Gross Margins to calculate Net Margin.

Those who are purchasing store lambs are 80% stocked up. High store prices increase the risk and some growers are taking fewer lambs this winter, and looking to sell grazing to other stock classes.

The irony of the season is that irrigators are back on and likely to see more action in autumn then in January. *Donna Lill, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Southwest North Island

An extended run of fine weather has been a real positive for growers, allowing them to make good progress with maize grain harvest. Growers from Opiki through to the Rangitikei are now well into maize grain harvest, with crops coming off steadily while conditions remain settled. Overall maize grain yields have ranged widely, with some very good results reported alongside more disappointing ones. Several growers have commented that late-sown crops have performed particularly poorly.

Some growers with vegetables in their rotations have also had a tough season, with adverse weather damaging crops leading to returns being well back on expectations. In Horowhenua, growers on heavier soils have reported strong yields, however some crops impacted by the New Year's storm had very poor yields and one dairy farmer reported that they will now purchase additional maize silage to make up the shortfall. Growers on the sandier Horowhenua soils reported average to poor yields for maize silage this year. An enormous amount of grass silage was harvested this year, and this, coupled with a rebound in pasture residuals, means that most dairy farmers we spoke to were comfortable with their feed situation.

Buckwheat harvest is now complete, with yields coming in slightly lower than expected. Other crops have generally fared better. Barley silage has performed well, with one grower reporting yields of around 12 t/ha from a very late planting. Peas have been one of the standout performers this season for a number of growers, with strong yields reported; one grower reported 10.6 t/ha. Recent extended fine weather has helped with harvest progress and contractor's report it's been a much more straightforward run than expected. One did note however he still has some maize left to sell and is hoping the stabilising dairy payout will help drive more interest in supplement feed for next season. *Megan Cushnahan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Eastern North Island

East Coast

While ex-Tropical Cyclone Vaianu brought a burst of strong winds and heavy rain, impacts were not as severe as first feared. No serious damage to maize crops has been reported, with most growers coming through the event in good shape. Since then, the weather has settled into a more typical autumn pattern, with a mix of fine spells and passing fronts. There have been some decent dry windows, but also enough showers and humidity to make timing tricky. That's meant a bit of stop–start for contractors, with growers making good progress whenever conditions allow.

Wairarapa

From mid-April onward, Wairarapa saw a much more disruptive run of weather, with a major rain event around 20–23 April. Heavy rain led to flooding, slips and high rivers, with conditions tough on the ground and some clean-up needed on farms. Fortunately, for most growers impacted by flooding the water receded relatively quickly and there's been little lasting damage, aside from a few low-lying areas needing to be reseeded back into grass.

Since then, some cooler, more settled weather has helped soils start to dry out, although some are still heavy. These stop–start conditions have made life difficult for contractor with limited windows to get

jobs done at the right time. Maize grain harvesting is now largely complete in Wairarapa as well, despite the challenges from that late-April rain. *Megan Cushnahan, FAR Regional Facilitator*

Northern North Island

The maize grain harvest is underway; around halfway finished. It is looking to be yielding well and is keeping contractors busy at present. Some growers with additional yield have thought ahead to store their grain in dryers, ensuring pricing optimisation.

Maize silage is all in with reasonable yields, averaging between an estimated 5-10% up on last season. Most sold well.

There are some crops impacted by the recent flooding around the central Waikato that were unable to be harvested so were ploughed back into the soil. Although this wasn't a large area of land in total it did affect a number of growers in this region.

The cold nights in the region mean that new grass and cover crops are slow to establish. The region is looking forward to some warm rain to kick things along in this area.

Of note is the prevalence of black beetle; it is observed as higher than previous seasons. Some replant of the new grass has occurred due to either this or possibly slug damage. Wet conditions at sowing have probably contributed. *(Rachel Mudge, FAR Regional Facilitator)*

Crop management

General

Impact of dry soils

A bit of rain is forecast for the weekend as I write this, but soils on many farms are still very dry and this will be having an impact on several on-farm activities. Some things to consider:

- Many pre-emerge herbicides are less effective in dry soils and follow-up weed control may be needed.
- Moisture probes need rain or irrigation to bed in properly, so allow for this in your planning if you have newly-installed probes. Be aware, however, that irrigating at this time of year can cool down soils unnecessarily, which will slow down crop growth.
- Dry soils are less prone to soil compaction, which may allow you to get onto paddocks that would be inaccessible at other times of the year.

Slugs

Anecdotal evidence and recent weather patterns suggest that slug pressure is not quite as bad as some seasons, but they always present a risk to newly-sown crops, especially clover and brassicas. There are a few new slug management products on the market since this time last year, so check out the updated list here.

An on-farm biosecurity plan

Having a biosecurity plan is important because not only does it protect your farm (and New Zealand as a whole) against unwanted incursions, it is also a vital tool to prevent the development of a herbicide-resistant weed population on your property.

FAR have produced an arable farm biosecurity register to help you create a clear biosecurity plan. It covers six areas:

- Visitors, e.g. contractors and consultants, and their vehicles, clothing, tools etc.
- Machinery, particularly those belonging to contractors.
- Livestock and brought-on feed.
- Seed and plant material, including using tested clean seed and detailed record keeping.
- Monitoring for biosecurity incursions, particularly regular crop walks, and what action to take if they occur.
- Good communication with neighbours, contractors, advisors and everyone involved in the farm business.

For more information and to download the risk register see www.far.org.nz/resources/arable-biosecurity-risk-register.

Particular issues for weed biosecurity include: the movement of people, machinery, seeds and animal feeds on the farm and develop protocols for reducing these risks. For example:

- Requirements for machinery clean down and movement on and off the farm.
- Requirements for personnel visiting the farm and specific crops.
- Certification of seeds and ensuring clean seed.
- Specifications for imported feeds and moving feed within farm from known weedy areas.
- Undertaking regular crop scouting, particularly at crop establishment when many weeds germinate, but also towards and before harvest when escaped weeds are larger, easier to identify, and before they set seed.

Cereals

Aphid monitoring

Sticky traps continue to be set up in autumn-sown cereal crops across the South Island, with a decent amount of data now available. It has been a mild autumn, especially in Canterbury, and growers who are nearing (or at) tillering (GS 21) are considering getting a foliar insecticide onto the crop before, or soon after the start of, winter. While sticky trap data is showing aphid numbers on a downward trend, they are still relatively high for the time of year, reflecting the warmer weather. Beneficial insect numbers are also high at all monitored sites, so choosing an insecticide that has some aphid specificity should help keep aphid populations under control come spring. You can check the latest aphid monitoring info, as always, at Aphid Chat.

Herbage

Weed control in white clover

New white clover plantings establish quickly, so it's time to get out and identify any problem weed species in your crop. A common post-emergent herbicide at this time of year is flumetsulam (mode of action Group 2, e.g. Preside™). The flumetsulam label states that the crop should be past the four trifoliate leaf stage (but before stolon elongation) and that weeds should also be small. Some formulations of flumetsulam (e.g. Headstart®) state that they can be applied any time after emergence, but warn of the likelihood of some temporary yellowing and suppression of the crop.

Another option is Dynamo®, which contains bentazone (Group 6) in addition to flumetsulam. (Note that other formulations of bentazone exist.) Bentazone widens the range of weeds controlled, but is less effective in cool (less than 20°C) weather. The Dynamo® label states that crops should be past the two

trifoliate leaf stage, but before stolon elongation. Some growers suggest that both products can be used at earlier crop stages without adverse effects. Refer to the spray labels for lists of weeds controlled. Note that Dynamo® is often not used until temperatures warm up in spring.

You should also have a plan for any weed seedlings not controlled by the above sprays. Leaving control of species such as sow thistle (*Sonchus* spp.*)* until late winter/spring will make control much more difficult. Including a second herbicide such as MCPA or MCPB (both Group 4) in a tank mix may be worth considering. Research results on this topic are available here (see page 48). Always read the herbicide label before use.

If chickweed (or other weeds) does survive an initial spray, an option that can be used post-emergence is diflufenican (Group 12) plus bromoxynil (Group 6). Various formulations are available (Argosy®, Cheetah®, Platoon®), and are on-label to control chickweed up to the 6-leaf stage in white clover seed crops.

Grass weeds are generally considered easier to control in white clover seed crops. The mode of action Group 1 ("-fops" such as haloxyfop-P-methyl (Group 1, e.g. Gallant™ and generics) or clethodim (Group 1, Arrow® and generics) is an important weapon. However, populations of grasses with resistance to Group 1 herbicides do exist, and overusing a single active in a single area will lead to these herbicide-resistant populations dominating. Propyzamide (Group 3, Kerb™/Polka™) is a good alternative where Group 1 herbicide resistance is known or suspected. Order your propyzamide now to ensure you have the product on hand when the weather is right for application.

The table below lists herbicides suitable for use on white clover seedling crops. You can also browse the latest information from this year's trials in the booklet content associated with the Clover Weed Management event held last month.

Active ingredient	Trade name(s)	Target weeds	Mode of Action Group
Clethodim	Arrow® and generics	Grasses	1
Flumetsulam	Preside™, Headstart® and generics	Broadleaf	1
diflufenican + bromoxynil	Argosy® etc.	Broadleaf	12 + 6
Bentazone		Annual broadleaf	6
Propyzamide	Kerb™/Polka™	Grasses & sorrel	3
MCPA/MCPB		Broadleaf	4
Imazethapyr	Spinnaker® etc.	Broadleaf and grasses	2

Maize

Cover crops following maize grain and silage

FAR supports the use of cover crops following maize grain harvest. The benefits of cover crops can include:

- Retention of soil nutrients
- Prevention of soil erosion
- Improvement of soil quality
- Addition of N to the soil (if legumes are used)
- Conservation of soil moisture
- Weed suppression
- Addition of forage to the system

Maize silage growers generally use annual ryegrass as a cover crop, sowing immediately after harvest. However, as maize grain crops are harvested later and leave a lot of residue in the paddock, other, more easily established cover crop species are favoured. FAR hasn't measured soil nitrogen this year at NCRS, but measurements in the long-term establishment trial (post-harvest) ranged from 30-132 kg/ha. With an average of 78 kg/ha. Without a catch crop, this N could be lost to leaching over winter.

- Winter-active choices such as annual ryegrass and cereals like oats allow excess nutrients to be taken up rather than lost to leaching.
- Vetch is an attractive choice for its performance, but the seed cost will put most growers off.
- A lupins/oats mix is another option as a cover crop post-maize grain, but should be terminated early before the biomass gets excessive.

Recent research by FAR and AgResearch has also shown how cover crops can reduce herbicide inputs by providing weed control, thereby also reducing the risk of herbicide resistance developing. Under this maize grain system weed control was achieved with only two herbicide applications – glyphosate to terminate the cover crop, followed by a post-emergence herbicide application. You can read a full report on this research in Cover crops for weed management – Arable Update 88.

Oilseed Rape

Weed control in new oilseed rape sowings

Most oilseed rape crops have been sown, so it's time to be thinking about weed control. Pre-emergence herbicides such as trifluralin (Group 3) will have done much of the job already, but be on the lookout for potential problem weed populations, and consider a post-emergence spray if needed. Two Group 1 herbicides that are commonly used are fluazifop-P-butyl (Fusilade® Forte) and clethodim (Sequence™ and other generics). If herbicide resistance to Group 1 herbicides has been identified or suspected in the area, consider using Kerb® (propyzamide, Group 3) instead. Note that haloxyfop is not to be used on any oilseed rape crop, and remember that continued use of herbicides from a single mode-of-action group can lead to the development of an herbicide-resistant weed population over time.

Weather Updates

Seasonal climate outlook

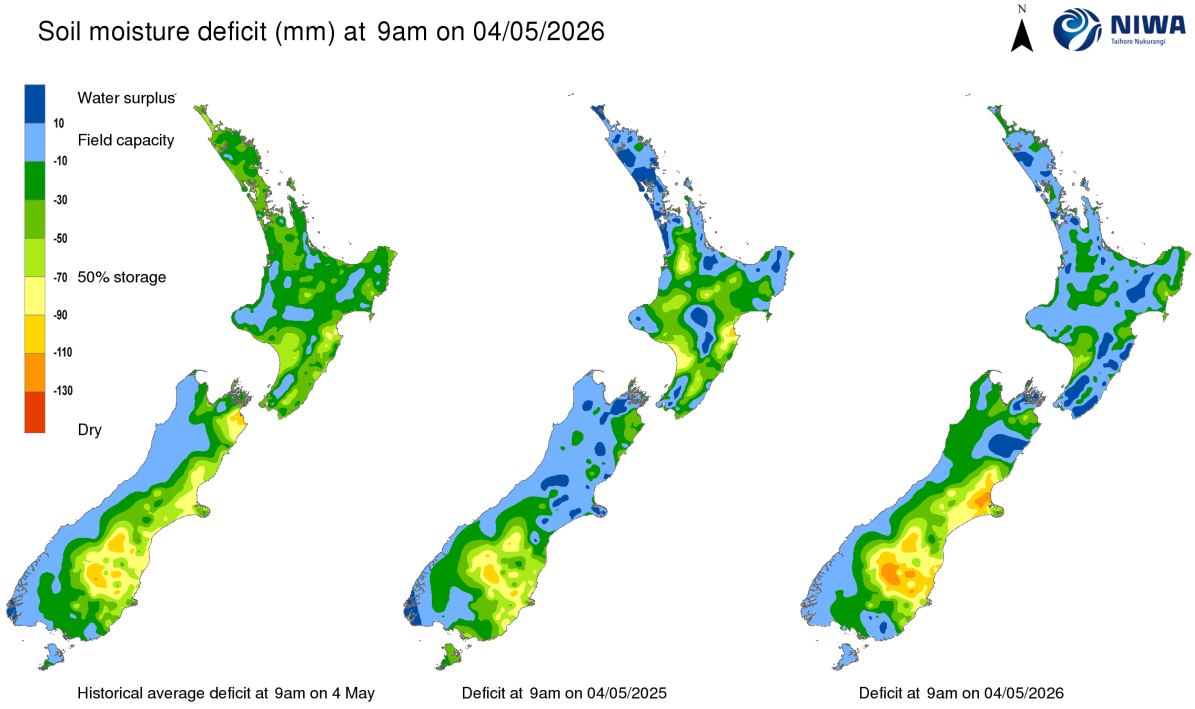
According to NIWA's outlook summary for May-July, dry conditions are expected to continue, with no regions expecting more rainfall than normal except the South Island's West Coast. Other areas are forecast to be either near or below the average. Soil moisture levels will likely remain relatively low. Temperatures are expected to be near or below average for all regions except the north and east of the

North Island, where temperatures close to the historical average are expected. Expect some cold snaps also. A significant proportion of the weather systems will be from the south to south-west during the three-month period in question.

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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