

South: In need of a drink, but mostly holding-up well (CropWatch)

The wheats on our gravels are really suffering from lack of moisture now, looking decidedly pale with leaves completely rolled. Although most of our ground has had barely 6mm of rain in the past four weeks, though, the rest of the crops are holding-up well; mainly because the dry winter and spring has ensured such good rooting to depth.

The dry and settled conditions have meant we've been able to keep well on top of disease levels in general and Septoria in particular with well-timed spray programmes through to the T3s just going on to our southern-most wheats as they start flowering.

We've yet to see any yellow rust. And the solatenol-based T2s we used on varieties with a clear brown rust weakness have done a good job.

With Agrii trials showing more than three quarters of the most widely-grown varieties worryingly susceptible to brown rust, we continue to be concerned on this front wherever solatenol wasn't included at T2; on varieties like Graham, for instance, which so many have valued for its disease strengths but which is really little more than a 4.0 for brown rust resistance these days.

In these cases, we're looking to the main prothioconazole + tebuconazole co-formulation we're using at T3 for some useful extra activity.

Our earlier worries over blossom midge - both orange and yellow - have largely evaporated as there hasn't been enough rain to trigger much of a hatch. Even if we get the rain we really do need in the coming week or so, it looks like most of our wheats will be through the danger period.

Their real danger, though, lies in the sort of drought stress likely throughout flowering if we continue to miss out on meaningful rain. As well as reducing grains/ear in our wheats, this will set back early pod fill in our rape crops, most of which have enjoyed a really good - if very prolonged - flowering.

If it stays as dry as it has been, we are definitely going to need to hold-off on OSR desiccation for as long as possible to secure yields and oil contents this season. Dare I suggest that avoiding desiccation altogether and relying on natural ripening - may be something to consider? After all, many growers in other parts of Europe do this very successfully, harvesting their wheats and earlier-drilled spring barleys first.

Speaking of which, our spring barleys have been romping along - with awns emerging on the earlier drillings and flag leaves fully out on later ones. Many have gone from GS 31 to 39 in less than 14 days. Although disease levels are generally well-contained, with a larger crop area and growing resistance to triazoles, we're taking no chances with ramularia, using a combination of triazole, SDHI and chlorthalonil at T2 in most cases.

They too need a decent drink - but not a dull, wet summer, please. This won't help anything - not even the wheats on our gravels which are, sadly, fast getting beyond meaningful yield recovery.