

Spring crops taking advantage of a very promising start (AF)

Mid-May and the inch of rain we had last week has been just what our spring-sown crops needed. They all found enough early moisture in some pretty good seedbeds and now they have had a timely top-up. Our barleys are generally well-tillered and even; our maize is coming through nicely; and all our potatoes have gone in a treat.

In all three crops, weed control has been our key priority this month to restrict the competition that can so easily compromise performance.

The barleys have been receiving a co-formulation of tribenuron-methyl and thifensulfuron-methyl with fluroxypyr to tackle the usual broad-leaved threats. As well as kinder to the crop than metsulfuron-methyl, this SU combination poses the least residue risk for any following OSR.

Although slightly early, we have been combining this with our prothioconazole/trifloxystrobin-based T1 because (a) the crop will move very rapidly with the warmer weather and (b) we don't want wheat T2s getting in the way of its application. By the time you read this we should be ready to go in with the same fungicide combination at T2. Like the T1, we will include chlorothalonil for the best all-round protection – against ramularia, in particular.

Being so susceptible to early weed competition, our maize will be getting its four-leaf follow-up to pre-em pendimethalin soon too. Here, we will be targeting broad-leaves and grassweeds; either with a foramsulfuron, iodosulfuron-methyl-sodium and isoxadifen-ethyl co-formulation, or with nicosulfuron plus mesotrione with or without terbuthylazine. In most cases we will be adding a trace element mix with plenty of zinc, both to meet particular crop demand and as a herbicide safener.

With the potatoes, it has been a matter of holding-off on the metribuzin-based pre-ems as long as we dare to target as much emerged weed growth as we can. As they are still securely below the surface we are including an approved glyphosate to target problem grassweeds.

The next job here for our main pre-pack market will be irrigation at tuber initiation for the best possible scab control. Then, before you know it, we will be starting on the blight programme. Wherever we see problems it is usually because treatment didn't start early enough. So we like to get on first at rosette stage to 'coat the row' and prevent zoospores getting down to the tubers.

In the meanwhile, of course, T2 time is upon us for our wheats, with flag leaves emerging strongly. A dry and none-too-warm April and just the right three-week gap from our T1s has kept a firm lid on disease development so far. But there is plenty of Septoria in the base of the crops to cause us concern with warming weather following some serious splash events. We are also acutely conscious of the brown rust susceptibility we have in so many of today's varieties.

Because of this benzovindiflupyr is our main T2 SHDI of choice, partnered with chlorothalonil and a strong triazole mix – either epoxiconazole + metconazole or prothioconazole + tebuconazole, depending on what we used at T1. Relatively clean plants and some reasonably settled weather in the forecast means we have been in no rush to put this on before full flag leaf emergence.

With our growth stage-based tissue testing highlighting some clear nutritional imbalances in the high potential crops we have this season, we are including extra magnesium, boron and manganese with most of our T2s.

Thankfully, there's not much more to be said of our oilseed rape. It has flowered well and evened-up nicely in a favourable April. Generally low sclerotinia pressure means we have only had to employ the single mid-flowering spray of prothioconazole/tebuconazole with azoxystrobin we planned rather than a more costly SDHI.

Plenty of pods throughout the canopy does, however, mean we are going to have to be very patient with our desiccation so we capture as much of yield and oil as we can.