



Teagasc Crops Better Farm

March Diary

Cork

Its been a busy fortnight for the Crowleys who's main tasks involved delivering grain and straw, fertiliser applications and sowing. "Our free flowing land has allowed us to get spring barley in two weeks ago in relatively good conditions" said John Crowley. The break in the weather a couple of weeks ago allowed the application of pig slurry to the ground prior to ploughing. "We recon the application of 2,000 gallons of pig slurry per acre will save us approximately the same value as two bags of 10:10:20 per acre". Research has shown to get the best out of pig slurry rapid incorporation is essential. "It was difficult to get all the pig slurry ploughed down within two hours to trap the maximum amount of nitrogen but we did the best we could", commented John. Logistics of having enough slurry in the field to keep ahead of the plough was difficult but John thinks the system can be significantly improved next year to ensure the best incorporation possible. The last of the Crowleys spring barley was planted last week as some of their heavier land needed the full two weeks to dry out.. Quench was the main variety planted and John is always anxious to incorporate fertiliser into the seed bed (75kg 10:10:20/ac) to aid establishment and boost early growth.

Rhyncho in winter barley has become a hot topic over the past number of weeks but the Crowleys crops remain relatively clean. Saffron has some fresh rhyncho but levels are low. Formosa and Sequel winter barley have almost no signs of disease so far. John is planning to apply a three spray fungicide strategy on the winter barleys. Due to the disease levels the first application started at the end of last week (on Saffron) and the other varieties will be sprayed a later this week. On the marketing front, John is happy he has some of his grain forward sold but as he pointed out harvest is a long way off and nobody knows which way prices will go from here.

Wexford

When talking to George and Ken Williamson they were reflective about resowing oats last week. "We put the decision off as long as possible but we decided to plough up approximately 30% of our winter oats" said Ken. "Plant counts on some of the fields are only reasonable at between 110-140 plants per meter squared and we think these crops have the potential to deliver 2.5 t/ac" said Ken. The gross margin on these crops will outstrip a good yielding crop of spring barley (if reestablishment costs are taken into account). The Williamsons replanted spring oats into this ground as they want to keep the rotation intact and are hoping for a lift in oat prices. The remaining crops of winter oats have received 50kg/ha (40 units/ac) of nitrogen a couple of weeks ago and will get another boost of nitrogen in a fortnight.

All winter wheat and barley have received their P and K and have received 75kg/ha (60 units/ac) of nitrogen. "Our crops are starting to green up after the

nitrogen application a couple of weeks ago, but the cold dry weather slowed growth considerably” commented George. These crops are quite clean of disease however the barley will get three fungicides this season with the first starting late last week or early this week.

The weed pressure was not especially high this year in the Williamsons winter wheat crops. “We finished applying Alistair to winter wheats a couple of weeks ago with the main targets Annual Meadow Grass, wild oats and some soft broad leaved weeds” said George.

All the Williamsons ploughing was completed in excellent condition and the first of the spring barley will be planted this week if the weather holds. “About half our land is suitable for planting in March with the rest best left until the land warms up” said Ken. Last year the Williamsons planted spring barley on a heavy field on the 12th of April and it went on to yield 3.5t/ac. Snakebite and Frontier will be the main varieties planted this year, as they have consistently delivered on the farm. “From observations and results of the DAFF variety trials on our land we will plant some Propino this year” said Ken. Our preferred seeding rate will be 170 kg/ha (11 st/ac) with Propino planted a little heavier due to its larger thousand grain weight.

Meath

“The significant drop in grain prices over the past three weeks should help growers refocus on attainable margins” according to Joe O Donoghue. Land rental prices rarely appeared to reflect the potential returns from cereals and this year is no exception in the Meath Dublin catchment. “Unless growers have 100% of their crops sold forward (at over €200/t dried), which is unlikely, then budgets need to be adjusted to reflect lower prices quoted today” according to Joe. Forward selling has been a feature on the O Donoghues farm this year which appears to be a good decision as of this week. “Only time will tell if forward selling was the correct decision but it allows some comfort when forward markets plummet by €40/t” said Joe.

All winter crops are looking well on the O Donoghues farm and have responded to last weeks growth. Manganese deficiency has shown up in a crop of wheat. “This field has a history of manganese deficiency and I try to target an early application before significant growth starts” said Joe. Early nitrogen has been applied to all crops, with 70kg/ha (56 units/ac) applied so far. Unlike many other crops the O’Donoghues winter barleys are clean so far and the fungicide programme will start this week. “The fungicide Helix has worked well over the past number of years and this will be my first fungicide on winter barley, depending on price of course” said Joe. A three spray fungicide program will be used again this year.

Joe is planning to follow his discussion groups advice and leave out the TO on winter wheats as the group deemed the application unnecessary as yield increases were unlikely (looking at research results and growers experience) and the group members were confident of applying the T1 to the third last leaf fully emerged.

Ground ploughed up reasonably well but further cultivation is needed. The O Donoghues plant spring barley using an initial run of a power harrow combined with fertiliser placement followed by a powered cultivator/seed drill. "As our land is heavy and it can be cold in early spring so we prefer planting seed with fertiliser placed at the root zone to help establishment" said Joe. Spring planting didn't start until late last week as the O Donoghues needs at least two weeks of good drying weather before Joe would consider planting it. If the weather holds, Joe hopes to plant a good proportion of the ground but the decision to plant is based entirely on ground conditions. The main varieties which will be planted this year are Quench and Cropton with some Propino.