

Crop management

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While many farmers have their crops drilled and established in relatively good conditions this year, there are quite a number of crops that still have received no insecticide or herbicide at this stage. Wet conditions persisted through much of November, which have left ground conditions soft in many instances. Similar to 2019, as we come towards the end of the year, some growers have two questions on their minds at the moment.



Grass weeds that have tillers are more difficult to control.

1. Should I still apply an autumn herbicide or not?

In the case of winter barley where fields contain high populations of annual meadow grass then the answer is yes, provided the land is trafficable. The general rule of thumb for grass weed control is the earlier the better.

Most October-sown crops are somewhere from the 2-4 leaf stage, so good control is still achievable. Once grass weeds start to tiller, they become more difficult to control, especially in winter barley, where the herbicide options are not as plentiful. If it's broadleaved weeds that are the issue in wheat, barley or oats, then there are options for spring control.

2. Should I apply an insecticide this year or not?

This is a very difficult question to answer, but if the crops have been sown in late October, then the research would suggest that the risk is lower than for crops sown in late September or

early October. Early-drilled crops or those near the coast are in a higher risk category and may benefit from an application if they have not yet received one. If crops have received a pyrethroid already, then a second application may not have the same level of control and will potentially increase selection for resistant aphids. Last year was not a year where we saw a lot of barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) infections, even in crops that received late insecticide applications (i.e., January) or none at all. This may have been due to the very wet

conditions and below average temperatures for November. Compare this to 2018, when BYDV symptoms were much more prevalent, temperatures at many of the Met Éireann stations for November and December that year were up to 2°C higher than in 2019 and this may have facilitated more aphid movement. Temperatures so far this year are similar to 2018 for November and if this trend continues in December, then we may see increased aphid activity within crops and subsequent BYDV symptoms appearing next spring.

Yearly review

While 2020 is a year that most people will want to forget as quickly as possible for a variety of reasons, it is still important that farmers take time to reflect and review farm performance over the year. As we know, many growers had to switch from winter cereals and plant more spring cereals in 2020, which not only resulted in lower output, as was reported in the recent Teagasc Harvest Report, but was also reflected in lower farm incomes for many people. However, there are still some lessons that can be learned from 2020 for tillage farmers. Here are some examples:

1. In the Teagasc Harvest Report, many contributors commented that winter crops had partially failed in some areas and as a result many growers, in desperation, opted to re-drill these crops in spring into poor seedbeds. These spring-planted crops performed poorly in many circumstances and only compounded the original losses. Some growers, however, knowing that the ground conditions were poor even up until April, left these bare patches in fields alone and used the time over the summer months to



Replanting into poor seedbeds increased losses for some farmers.

- rectify issues such as drainage or problematic weeds. In hindsight, this seems to have been a wise decision.
2. Spring-sown winter wheat has on occasion performed well and has actually left a margin, when drilled into good conditions. This year however, many crops were drilled in relatively poor conditions and late (i.e., late February or early March). In general, from the Harvest Report surveys received by Teagasc, these crops performed very poorly. Again in 2020, we see some fields that were

due to be drilled with winter wheat are still to be planted and while they can be planted with winter varieties up to mid February, conditions need to be good.

3. Bean area increased significantly this year as growers ran out of options of other crops to drill and needed to comply with the three crop rule for greening. Many of these crops were planted into sites that were not really suitable for beans and crops performed poorly as a result. Growers should really assess the suitability of their land for beans in future, in order to give the

best chance to grow a profitable crop. There are plenty of other examples of decisions that growers made in 2020 that probably, in hindsight, were not the correct choice for the farm or the particular field. These should be recorded when completing farm records for the year, as they will provide useful information in future years when you are faced with similar problems. The overall lesson from 2020 for tillage farmers is that decisions made in haste or those that are poorly thought out, rarely work out for the best.

Nutrient management planning

As a requirement to comply with nitrates regulations, all farmers must have completed fertiliser records on farm and while these don't have to be completed until March 2021, now is the ideal time to get the job done while the season is still fresh in the memory.

Check to make sure that all fields have an up-to-date soil analysis report and, if not, get any outstanding fields tested as soon as possible. Recent analysis of soil tests carried out by Teagasc suggests that approximately 88% of all soils are deficient in

one or more elements, such as phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). The NMP Online programme is a very useful planning and recording tool and can plan out your requirements for the 2021 season. Once the soil analysis, crop choice and rotation have been entered into the programme, it will calculate how much chemical fertiliser each field and crop requires based on yields and the amount of organic manures applied. Indeed, some farmers have already forward purchased some, if not all, of their fertiliser requirements for 2021.

Teagasc tillage podcast

The Tillage Edge podcast has proved to be popular among tillage farmers this year, with all the latest news and relevant advice being discussed. Various experts have contributed to a very informative series on a wide range of topics including crop agronomy, seasonal updates, grain markets,

machinery, finance, etc. All of our podcasts which were produced throughout the year are available to listen to or download. So if you want to hear the latest episode or if you missed one during the year, you can access them on the Teagasc website, Apple Podcasts, Spotify or through the QR code above.



Grass weed survey



As December is a good time for completing bookwork, remember the Teagasc Enable Conservation Tillage (ECT) project is still carrying out the online survey to get farmer insight on grass weed resistance management strategies. The survey is an important part of the overall project and will help to develop control strategies and the best supporting advisory messages for the future.

It takes about 10 minutes to complete. Scan the QR code (right) with your phone's camera to complete the survey.



Complete the grass weed survey now.

HEALTH & SAFETY



Prevent fire deaths in the home

Deaths due to fire are a source of tragedy in farmhouses. An Irish Health Research Board (HRB) study has shown that farmers and agricultural workers account for 20% of fire deaths nationally. This is proportionately higher than other sectors. Almost all fires occurred in dwelling houses. Contributory factors included smoking, high alcohol consumption, plugged-in or faulty electrical devices, open fires, and frying or chip pans. A small number of fires were linked to candles burning. Give preventing fires in your home and on your farm attention over the coming months.



Take fire-safety action.

This year, due to Covid-19, people are likely to be home more often, so the risk is increased.

Fire safety advice is available at:

www.firesafetyweek.ie.