

Ready in defence mode



“There’s a volume of septoria inoculum waiting to build, plenty of mildew and in some cases, brown rust.”

PAUL GRUBER

With the weather finally beginning to turn after weeks of inclement conditions, the joy of spring seems to be tantalisingly close. Still, experts reiterate that growers could be in for a disease heavy season. *CPM* gets the lowdown.

By Janine Adamson

In many ways, messaging from industry is beginning to sound like a stuck record – early drilling, forward crops, high disease risk, focus on fungicides. While repetitious, it should hardly be surprising.

Those with an air of cynicism may attribute this to a desire to ‘flog’ more chemistry, however, with prolonged damp conditions and few frost events, is it time to heed the advice?

Hutchinsons’ David Howard stresses that complacency should be avoided across the whole cropping rotation. “Growers shouldn’t be lulled into a false sense of security following the relatively

low disease incidence seen last season, when a cold January and February followed by a dry spring and summer, helped to keep a lid on problems.

“The situation could be very different with more normal weather patterns this season. Although the winter is likely to have slowed and delayed rust arrival in crops, to what extent is always challenging to predict until we get to spring, and it’s unlikely to have gone completely.”

According to ProCam’s regional technical manager Nigel Scott, the reality is indeed high risk, with growers in the North facing a ‘double whammy’.



High alert

Previously, options like LG Typhoon and Champion were relatively easy-going varieties, but these are now high-input from T0 onwards, stresses ProCam’s Nigel Scott.

Calming the chaos of chocolate spot

Protecting clean bean leaves from severe disease pressure is critical

Following the prolonged wet weather recently, field beans have come under severe pressure, namely from chocolate spot. And with every rain event, the risk of spreading spores onto new growth continues, warns Syngenta field technical manager, Simon Jackson.

Latest reports from PGRO support evidence from the field, highlighting that early applications of fungicides may be required to prevent further development. This means checking bean crops should be a priority, especially on the underside of leaves where leaf spots may be more prevalent.

Simon urges protecting newly emerging leaves from continuing infection at the earliest opportunity. "Field trials and growers' experience suggest Amistar (azoxystrobin) can keep leaves green and clean of infection until weather conditions dry up and the main fungicide programme can kick in.

"For added curative activity in high pressure situations on infected crops in continuous wet weather, tank-



High pressure

Caption: Early applications of fungicides may be required to prevent further development of chocolate spot in winter beans.

mixing a product with some curative activity, such as metconazole, would further increase results," he adds.

In response to research into bean disease resistance management, growers should avoid using an SDHI at this stage in the season so it can be utilised later in the programme, points out Simon.

He says one of the challenges with wet soils is finding a spray opportunity and a period where crops aren't under stress for application. "Growers should also be alert for potential risk of frost damage exacerbating

any spray effects, ideally applying before any frost forecast, or leaving at least five days after a frost event for plants to recover. The impacts of early chocolate spot under such high-pressure conditions can be severe.

"With the potential of well-established bean crops from the autumn, the current aim is to protect the new growth. Then, when we get to Elatus Era (benzovindiflupyr+ prothioconazole) timing for both chocolate spot and brown rust – from GS51 – there's strong clean growth and good yield opportunity."

► "There are a lot of forward crops with septoria already in the base. This is in addition to justified concerns regarding yellow rust, given the North is where the Yr15 breakdown was first noted last year.

"With a lack of viable alternatives,

growers have had to continue with susceptible varieties even if the resistance scores have dropped significantly. For example, in the past options like LG Typhoon and Champion were relatively easy-going varieties, but these are now high-input from T0 onwards and must be guarded appropriately," he stresses.

Nigel, who's based in Durham, says on average, growers drilled winter wheat up to 10 days earlier than usual

in his area into warm soils; autumn conditions were then conducive to forward growth. He adds that it's a similar story for winter barley too.

"Barley is looking very forward, increasing the risk of diseases such as net blotch. For those growers who've grazed their bulky crops with sheep, this will help to manage subsequent PGR and fungicide use, although isn't something I'd recommend now onwards."

Nigel's colleague

Paul Gruber is based in North Oxfordshire and highlights the changes between this season and 2024/5.

"Yellow rust was first observed in my crops around 31 January this year,

while last year it wasn't visible until May. Importantly, this is comparing the same variety – Champion.

"This confirms the significance of the Yr15 breakdown, that it's very real and widespread across the country."

Paul says many growers in his area won't necessarily be used to seeing yellow rust, so communicating



Country-wide issue

ProCam's Paul Gruber says the significance of the Yr15 breakdown is very real and widespread across the country.

"Biological controls may provide another option to help keep disease at a manageable level when fungicide options are limited."



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A captive audience

Secretary of state Emma Reynolds announced the new SFI offer at the NFU conference in February.

SFI update for 2026

Fewer actions and less complexity lie ahead, but with an annual agreement cap

According to Defra, the new SFI offer for 2026 has been shaped directly by industry feedback to support 'productive, profitable farm businesses while delivering environmental outcomes'.

As outlined by secretary of state Emma Reynolds at the NFU conference, Defra has worked closely with stakeholders during workshops and forums, using the feedback to refine and strengthen the policy within the scheme.

Looking at the broad headlines, firstly, SFI should be simpler with fewer actions and less complexity. Then, it promises fairness and access will improve, with a £100,000 annual agreement cap so more farms can benefit.

Delving into the detail, the new offer includes 71 actions (down from 102 in SFI24), having removed those with low uptake or that perceived to deliver less for food production, the environment, or wider environmental targets.

By reducing some payment rates introducing an area cap for the enhanced overwinter stubble, and applying the new annual agreement cap, this should ensure that more farms can participate.

In particular, rate reductions will apply to herbal lays CSAM3 (from

£382/ha to £224/ha), winter bird food CAHL2 (from 853/ha to £648/ha) and legume fallow CNUM3 (£593/ha to £532/ha). Defra states this is because initial payment rates were set too high, making it too attractive to take productive land out of food production.

For small farms up to 50ha, and all without existing ELM agreements, SFI will open in June for two months. There will then be a second window from September for all farms, which currently has no closing date.

CLA President Gavin Lane says he's pleased SFI has been adapted. "But introducing a cap on payments has risks; limiting the ambitions of those that can do the most for nature. This is counterproductive when the government has legally binding environmental targets and some may have no choice but to intensify production.

"Many farm businesses are facing some of the bleakest profitability conditions in a generation. BPS is virtually gone and SFI is an essential income stream to build business resilience and support food production. We'll continue to work closely with Defra to ensure the scheme is as accessible and flexible as possible," he comments.

the importance of applying a T0 to protect crops will be essential. He's also seeing the presence of septoria. "As with everyone else, growers in the West went early despite not usually drilling until mid-October due to blackgrass concerns.

"As such, there's a volume of septoria inoculum waiting to build, plenty of mildew and in some cases, brown rust. We also have to be aware that lodging risk is high, as well as poor blackgrass management leading into future seasons."

Should septoria pressure be high by T0, David says growers should consider including multi-site folpet in the tank mix to help gain control.

"Use chemistry wisely to its best effect, considering the strengths of individual actives, and where they're best used in the programme. But, beware of label restrictions that prevent the use of some products before GS30.

"Biological controls may provide another option to help keep disease at a manageable level when fungicide options are limited, although remember they're purely protectant and not curative."

One crop Paul is particularly concerned about is winter beans. "Early drilled or forward plantings are under high chocolate spot pressure (see box). It's a wet weather disease and has cycled effectively due to the mild conditions.

"In these instances, crops will likely require extra fungicide and careful agronomic management," he urges. ●



Bubbling disease

Septoria is visible in the base of some crops, as shown by this image taken in January. Photo: Paul Gruber.



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Portfolio and Campaign manager, ADAMA UK



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