

TILLAGE

December 2022

Farm records

2022 will be remembered for a number of reasons such as high prices, record yields in some crops and some disasters in others, easy harvesting conditions, and finally a tough autumn for drilling. All of this conspired to make it one of the trickiest years for tillage farmers in living memory. So far, 2023 looks like it will be just as challenging, with continued high input prices likely to increase the risks to tillage farmers' incomes.

Given the uncertainty in all agricultural systems, it has never been as important for farmers to sit down at the end of each year and assess their business to see what is performing well and what is performing poorly. We have seen this year a knee-jerk reaction to poor winter barley yields in certain areas, with the predicted forecast for the area of the crop planted this autumn down possibly 20,000ha from last autumn. However, how often have we seen before that the following

harvest after a poor one turns out to be a relatively good year? Some fields seem suited better to certain crops than others and changing cropping systems can have a long-

Edited by
Shay Phelan,
Tillage Specialist



term effect on overall farm profitability.

To assist farmers in keeping digital records, which can be much more useful than paper-based systems, Teagasc has partnered with Farmplan to provide a crop recording software package called Gatekeeper Express+ for Teagasc clients. Farmers can enter their records digitally on a simple-to-use cloud platform. We believe that farmers who utilise this software will be in a better position to calculate returns per crop, variety, field or farm, and be in a stronger position to make changes based on specific areas or across the farm than those who don't have a system in place. The reports are also suitable for cross compliance purposes and can help to reduce the workload on farmers.

The Gatekeeper system is designed to save

time and improve accuracy on farm, allowing farmers to set up records and enter data in just a few minutes. Being cloud based, the software can be accessed via a web browser, reducing the cost of entry and reliance on specific hardware.

Coupled with its accompanying in-field recording app, Gatekeeper Cloud will not only support more efficient daily workflows, but make demonstrating compliance far easier. Farmers can also connect to their advisor who is using Gatekeeper Agronomist to get field recommendations sent directly to their account.

For more details on the system check out the link to the Teagasc website:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/crops/crop-recording/>.

Crop management

In many cases farmers have not been able to get back into fields since crops were drilled. The poor weather has made fields very soft underfoot and we have seen a few attempts to spray crops leave big ruts in tramlines, which will have to be endured for the rest of the season. While there are many jobs to be done, try to prioritise them into urgent treatments and those that can potentially wait until spring. For anyone with winter barley drilled, it is probably the crop for which treatment is most urgent. There have been many questions to Teagasc advisors over the last few weeks about the need to spray an insecticide for aphid control. We have seen from the research that when there has been a lot of rain it actually reduces aphid flight and so should reduce the

risk. That said, in areas where there is a history of bad barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) infections, farmers should walk crops and try to identify if aphids are present. They will usually be more visible on headlands so start there. If you feel that an insecticide is necessary, then one well-timed application will be as effective as multiple applications. Trials from both Oak Park and Cork over the last number of years clearly show no benefit from multiple applications. There are two options, either a pyrethroid (there are several different brands) or Transform, which is in its use-up period, with little difference in performance.

Grass weed control will also be a priority now as annual meadow grass and sterile brome control will be more difficult the longer we have to wait.

Products such as Firebird, Flight, Tower, etc., work best when grass weeds are small at the 1 to 2 leaf stage, but they will struggle when the grasses begin to tiller. Consult your advisor for which options will suit your situation best. The next crop that probably needs attention is winter oilseed rape. Many growers opted not to apply a herbicide at drilling due to the dry conditions. Some have applied a graminicide since to control volunteer cereals and some grass weeds but others haven't. We can now see plenty of phoma lesions on crops and in many cases, on more than the 10% threshold of leaves infected, so they will also need treatment. For weed control many will choose AstroKerb at 1.5-1.7L/ha and this will give control to a wide spectrum of weeds, including blackgrass, but consult the label or the Teagasc Crop Report for specific details. Remember that straw from crops treated with AstroKerb must be chopped and cannot be used for bedding, so these fields should be included in the straw incorporation measure (SIM) on the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application again next year. For disease control include a fungicide (probably prothioconazole based, e.g., Proline) at half



Tillering annual meadow grass will be difficult to control. rates. There may be some advanced crops that could benefit from a growth regulator effect and the inclusion of a tebuconazole (Fezan or Prosaro), or a metconazole (Sirena) will help to limit growth. Wheat and oat crops can generally wait for spring applications as they tend not to be at as high a risk from BYDV due to later drilling. In the case of wheat, there are still plenty of options for grass weed control in the spring.

Sustainable Use Regulation

The old Sustainable Use Directive for the safe use of pesticides is due to be superseded by a new Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR) in 2023. This will have a significant impact on the amount of plant protection products (PPPs) or pesticides allowed and how they are used into the future. The current Farm to Fork Strategy sets out two targets for pesticides.

1. To reduce by 50% the use and risk of

chemical pesticides by 2030 and increase the use of integrated pest management (IPM).

2. To reduce by 50% the use of more hazardous pesticides by 2030 in favour of less hazardous alternatives.

The proposed SUR also establishes additional requirements for the use, storage, sale and



New regulation is coming on pesticide use.

disposal of PPPs, pesticide application equipment (PAE), training, awareness raising, and for the implementation of IPM. The overall impact of the SUR will be felt not just in agriculture, but also in public places and it will also attempt to regulate how advice is given to the end user of the pesticide. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the EU have opened a consultation process for anyone to express their

concerns or opinions on this new regulation and there is an open invitation for farmers, consultants, advisors or members of the public to engage in the consultation until January 20, 2023. It is important that all stakeholders avail of this process to air their views on how pesticides are used and regulated into the future. To read more on this and/or to make a submission, see: <https://www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/>.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Child and fire safety over Christmas

It is important to be mindful of the safety of children during this time. Ensure there is a safe secure play area in place when children are outside. When children are in the farmyard they must always be supervised. Easy to read danger signs should be in place and these signs should be explained to children.

Give preventing fires in your home and on your farm your attention. Irish research has shown

that farmers and agricultural workers account for 20% of all fire deaths. Almost all fires occur in dwelling houses. This level is proportionately higher than other sectors. Contributory factors include smoking, high alcohol consumption, plugged in or faulty electrical devices, open fires, frying or chip pans, and a small number of fires are linked to candles. Fire safety advice is available at: <http://firesafetyweek.ie/>.

