

GROWERS FACE MIXED THREATS

Brassica growers must avoid complacency after a relatively easy start to the year

BRASSICA PEST CONTROL

The first nine months of 2009 have been fairly successful for brassica growers with a cold winter surprising early season aphids and a dry May-June leading to a lower incidence of foliar disease, but growers should not get complacent as the autumn nears.

According to Andy Richardson, joint managing director at the Allium and Brassica Centre, the disease threat for the remainder of the year is a mixed one. "Compared with 2008 and 2007 when very wet summers led to heightened levels of risk, the current cropping year is a welcome relief for growers," says Mr Richardson.

The exact threat, however, is complex. While recent reasonably dry weather reduced the risk of ring spot, dark leaf spot and phoma leaf spot, morning dews and showers have sustained the threat of white blister infection. In addition, the A&B Centre is advising growers that powdery mildew remains a moderate risk.

"Although there are a limited range of products with different modes of action on the market, it's possible to achieve effective control of the main foliar diseases, but to do so growers should follow a proactive rather than reactive approach," says Mr Richardson. "The key to effective disease control is to target fungicide

applications in accordance with disease risk before active lesions are evident in the crop."

Depending on the level of disease thought to be circulating, Mr Richardson suggests farmers should budget about £120/ha on ring spot and phoma control on a long season brassica crop such as Brussels sprouts, or around £180/ha if white blister is an additional problem.

"Triazole fungicides are extremely effective for control of a range of the foliar 'spots'. The use of triazole/strobilurin combinations such as Nativo 75WG (trifloxystrobin + tebuconazole) and Amistar Top (azoxystrobin + difenconazole) give effective control of a wide range of foliar disease, including good protectant control of white blister and powdery mildew," Mr Richardson advises.

INSECT THREATS

Much the same can be said for insect threat as a cold winter delayed migration of over-wintered peach potato aphid (*Myzus Persicae*) and mealy cabbage aphid (*Brevicoryne brassicae*).

While the season has differed slightly from that of a typical year, Chris Wallwork, UAP field vegetable agronomist, says the beneficial insects growers rely on to do much of the control work

have adapted well. "There's still an active population of beneficial insects which should help keep aphid levels in check," he says.

Growers can no longer adopt a blanket approach to aphid control, however, and need to identify pests and their position within the crop before choosing chemistry.

"If the mealy cabbage aphid (MCA) is hiding in the middle of the plant and peach potato aphid is on the underside of the leaf, it would be beneficial to combine Primicarb (Aphox) with Biscaya (thiacloprid), should the weather conditions be favourable to primicarb. If, however, the MCA is on the outer leaves, an application of Biscaya or Plenum would be sufficient," says Mr Wallwork.

Biscaya and Plenum must only be used when needed as only a small number of doses of each are permitted during the season. "It comes down to knowing which pest you have and the degree to which the beneficials, such as ladybirds, lacewings, hover flies and various parasitic wasps, can do the job for you when deciding which chemistry, if any, to use," adds Mr Wallwork. For best results with either Biscaya or Plenum he advises using an oil such as Phase 2 or adjuvant like UAP's Gateway.