2021 was a breath of fresh air with no big surprises!

Dr Vicky Foster, Head of BBRO

2020 was a tough year to follow, and with a lot of pessimism in the industry following some big crop losses, so it was great to have a fairly quiet year in 2021, in terms of agronomy and crop impact that is. What started as a very cold spring and rather dull August turned out to produce some very big yields in the end, with no significant weed, pest or disease pressures. This was certainly reflected in the plant clinic, with a little bit of everything but nothing of serious concern. However, one very interesting visitor into the plant clinic was the tortoise beetle (photo right, courtesy of Tim Martin), which was found in a few fields in 2021. This has rarely been seen in the UK – is this a sign of climate change??

Whilst there were some pockets of Virus Yellows this wasn't a big issue in 2021. However, it isn't a problem that's gone away, and we started a new suite of field trials (Operation Emerald) in 2021 that generated some excellent preliminary data, due to the good growing conditions. We will continue these trials for at least the next two years and then review the findings in more detail to decide on the practical implications for growers as well as the future virus reasearch priorties. You can see the initial findings on the BBRO website if you didn't attend our BeetTech events in February 2022, but these should be treated with caution at this early stage until we have more data. However, I believe it is important we share progress with you so you can see how we are using your levy to find solutions.

It was also a much better year for the Recommended List (RL) trials and the data generated were of high quality with few issues. We are now starting to build up a more substantial set of data from untreated RL trials, for the first time in 2021 we had a later lifted untreated trial. These data will be more important going forwards as the crop stays in the ground for longer and, as a result, will be more susceptible to later disease infections. Extended protection being delivered via future plant protection products or genetics.

One of the highlights for me in 2021 was being able to host our field events face to face, albeit in much smaller groups than previously, although your feedback suggests you really liked this approach. This allowed more opportunity to have open discussions within the groups, and we will build on this in 2022 with similar events.

Vicky

Dr Jon Knight,
Chair of the BBRO Stakeholder Committee

It seems that the only constant these days is change, and very little of it for the better. The Stakeholder Committee is charged with ensuring that you as growers and levy payers get the information you need to farm sugar beet profitably, now and into the future. Some things are obviously outside our control but getting it right in the field to ensure a resilient and economically viable system is something that BBRO can deliver. This year the Committee has gained two extra members who sit as growers and are not representing any other body. They both responded to our call for forward thinking people to join the Committee to ensure that we had greater grower engagement to keep us informed of what was happening at the "sharp end". David Jones is farm manager at Morley farms and James Beamish is farm manager at Holkham estates, both are fully engaged and proving their worth. I am sure there are lots of other growers out there with good ideas for research, development, or knowledge exchange, so if that is you, let the BBRO team know.

It does look as though BBRO Events are returning to being physical rather than virtual, as was the case with BeetTech 22, and hopefully this will continue with others to come. The delivery of knowledge to the industry is a key part of the BBRO mission and the Committee is working to ensure that this can be done in the most cost effective and efficient way.

One big change to the Committee this year was the departure of Prof Debbie Sparkes who has been involved with advising the BBRO for the past 9 years. Her extensive knowledge of the research relating to sugar beet will no longer be easily available and her continual challenge of the purpose and quality of the science will need to be picked up by others. Many thanks to Debbie and hopefully we can still call on her if advice is needed!

Apart from the eye watering increase in the price of inputs the virus yellows forecast is for very high levels in 2022, however, the good news is that CruiserSB was made available for seed treatment which should go a long way to effecting good control. The time and effort that goes into submitting Emergency Authorisations is significant and Prof Mark Stevens is to be thanked for his work in this area. It is important that all the regulations surrounding its use are adhered to in order to protect possible future applications.

Let us hope that this year's crop is a successful one despite all the challenges.

Jon