



AGRONOMY TECHNICAL NOTE – JULY 2012 MAIZE AND THE WEATHER IN 2012 SIMON DRAPER – MGA AGRONOMIST

Maize at the moment

I am afraid maize growth is reflecting the officially wettest May and June on record. Whilst maize can normally cope with wet weather, it is also one of the coldest on record giving the crop a double whammy, which has resulted in some of the yellowiest, stunted crops that we have seen for a long time.

It does not seem to matter when the crop was drilled, as the later crops have encountered this cold weather as well and have also become stunted. The earlier drilled crops have now got to the 8 leaf stage, but are still yellow and have lost some plants due to the seed becoming waterlogged or instances of capping, however they should to a large extent make up for this with some double cobbing, if we get some warm weather!

The yellowing of the crop is a reflection of the cold weather and in particular the exceptionally wet weather which has pushed the nitrogen down in the soil profile so that the small maize roots cannot currently reach it. This will change should we get some warm weather, allowing the roots to grow down, find the nitrogen and then they will be away.

If you think the cold weather is going to continue, you may wish to counteract this temporary lack of nutrient with either a foliar spray (make sure it contains some nitrogen) or a bit of nitrogen applied to the crop (30 kg/ha should be sufficient). With bagged nitrogen make sure the maize crop is small and the leaves have not formed into a 'cup'. If the cup is present, the prills could get stuck in the plant and if this is the case, some nitrogen crop scorch could occur - limiting the benefit of the nitrogen.

Earlier drilled crops are now coming out the other side and are starting to green up and so I would be tempted to leave these alone.

The prospects

With all the cold weather is the crop done for? Certainly not! Currently there is still everything to play for.

It is the weather in July and August which makes or breaks the maize crop. Before this the crop needs warmth and moisture to grow and produce a crop so that all the sunlight is intercepted from mid July onwards. We do have the moisture and it has been generally bright in between the showers, so all that is missing is the warmth - with temperatures forecast at 20C or above, there should be sufficient warmth to get the crop underway.

The old saying - knee high on the fourth July still holds true, but a better test is tasselling at the end of July.

Cold weather in August?

So what happens if we get cold weather in August - the crop will still grow, but cob formation is likely to be slow and so in this scenario we can expect a late harvest - mid October for the earlier varieties and it would be likely that although the bulk yield will be there, the starch content will be lower than anticipated.

For those that require high levels of starch in the ration (where high amounts of grass silage are also being fed), then it might be worth considering whole cropping some wheat as well, to get some extra starch in the ration.

It is a long way to go yet! So let's hope for some warm sunny weather in the next three weeks!

Maize eyespot

Maize eyespot is a potential threat this year. If the cold wet weather continues and for those where this is the norm i.e the western side of the UK, I would as a matter of course apply Sanction/Genie at 0.6 l/ha at the last moment when travel through the crop is feasible, this will for most be in the third week of July.