

MGA TIMES



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20 years of independant advice for farmers



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Agriculture

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WATCH OUT FOR SLUGS



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We are delighted to welcome a group of 20 or so new members who farm in the Axe and Tamar catchments in the south west of England. The farmers are taking part in a demonstration programme organised by the MGA and funded by the English Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative focusing on maize agronomy. Six, farm based demonstration sites have been set up in each of the two catchments, at which meetings will be organised though out the growing season to demonstrate and discuss topical maize growing issues.

The areas up for demonstration/discussion include:-

- ◆ Understanding soil structure and the cultivation options that can improve establishment and soil stability.
- ◆ The importance of getting drilling date right.
- ◆ Variety choice.
- ◆ The need for starter fertiliser.
- ◆ Making the most of organic manures in seedbed and as a top dressing.
- ◆ Avoiding weed competition and herbicide options.

As is expected, feedback from the meetings will be fed back to the MGA membership via the Times.

DITCH THE POWER HARROW?

On Wednesday and Thursday the first two demo meetings, focusing on pre drilling cultivation in the Axe and Tamar catchments in the west country, were held nr Honiton and Ashwater respectively. The 35 or so farmers in attendance heard from Simon Draper of the MGA and Richard Smith from the Environment Agency (EA) about what they should expect to see when looking down a soil pit, how to identify soil structure problems and what can be done to tackle them.

Richard (pictured on the right), who was keen to emphasis his long association with the MGA as well as the fact that he was from the advisory section of the EA, focused on the structure of the subsoil. He pointed out to members that sub-soil should break into natural blocks, the size of which depends on the soil type, by teasing the soil apart in the hands. Unnaturally large blocks may indicate that compaction has disturbed the natural soil structure. He went on to guide farmers in the identification of the porosity of these natural blocks, by talking them through the identification of natural channels through which water could drain and roots penetrate. Finally a simple test aimed at judging the consistency or density of a soil was outlined.



Simon Draper focused on the establishment of a suitable seedbed for maize. The highlight of the talk was challenging those present about their routine use of a power harrow. Simon argues that deep, well structured seed beds can deliver better crops than those from over cultivated seedbeds that often slump and are prone to wheeling compaction. He hopes to prove this by comparing crops grown via the farmer's current practice and his "improved" seedbed preparation. Simon also took the opportunity to talk those present through the need and use of a flat lift subsoiler and the potential to develop a cheap, all be it rougher than most would currently accept, seedbed in unploughed ground via a spring tine and drag harrow one pass approach.



The MGA will once again have a presence at this year's Cereals event which is being held at Leadenham in Lincolnshire on 11th & 12th June. We will be in the

Arable Outlook section on **Stand 472**. "Arable Outlook has been specially developed by the Cereals Event team together with the support of the National Non-Food Crops Centre for forward thinking farmers who are **considering alternative crops or markets**. Dedicated to crops destined for the renewables, polymer, chemicals, biofuel, construction and other lucrative markets like pharmaceuticals and cosmetics." Not only will the MGA office team be keen to see farmers thinking about alternative non food crops, but obviously grain maize and crimping is an expanding business and we can give advice on varieties, agronomy and nutrition to MGA members and hopefully encourage others to join the Maize Growers Association to also benefit from membership.

FEED PRICES—WHERE NOW??

With the weather summer-like at last, it seems a long way away before planning for next winter, but as has been shown in the last year, buying commodities in advance did prove a very cost effective exercise. Unfortunately at some stage everyone will be paying considerably more for their winter feed for all livestock. Chris Savery (pictured below) has written a useful technical note on where prices might be in the next year or so. The article has been illustrated with some eye opening graphs showing the rise in prices of not only feed, but fuel in the last year. These graphs have been taken from the Dairy Co website.



SLUG ADVICE FROM SIMON



Slug damage in maize at Town Barton 2007

With the wet warm weather (and more rain in the south in the last few days) slugs have become very active. Therefore fields need to be checked – best done by test baiting - putting some slug pellets under a slate and if after 24 hours 4-5 slugs or more can be found, then the field needs to be treated.

If the seed has been dressed with Mesuroil then there will be some deterrent activity, but all the same, fields should be treated. It does not really matter what type of pellets, but it is more important to have sufficient coverage so slugs can be caught

quickly (Therefore the higher the rate within reason, the better). With the speed of growth, persistence of the slug pellets is not that important and as long as the pellets are around for 7-10 days that should be sufficient.

EMAIL ADDRESS & DETAILS UPDATE

The office have had quite a few members suggesting we send mailings and alerts via email. We are currently investigating the possibility of sending emails via our website, which if costs permit will be modernised in the next few months. To be able to make the most of these facilities, the office would like to check that we have the correct addresses for all members. I have spoken to one or two members who are not computer savvy (I don't blame them!) but we will still be posting mailings as normal unless specific members request otherwise. The cost savings would be quite considerable and important information and updates could be sent out immediately. We have enclosed a card for you all to fill in and send back. Please make sure you write your email address clearly and case sensitive. If everyone, (even regular emailers), could do this it would be very much appreciated. In case you are worried about sending this information through the post, there is a form on the website www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk fill in and email back to:-

info@maizegrowersassociation.co.uk

We would like all commercial and associate members to complete the form as well. All the information given will not be passed on to third parties.

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