

MGA TIMES



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THE MAIZE CONFERENCE – THURSDAY 25TH FEBRUARY 2010

All those growing/using, or involved with the growing/using of maize, can now book their place at the leading UK event focusing on the maize crop, be it grown for forage or grain maize production.

A full flyer will be circulated in the new year for the event, which will include papers from farmers and researchers leading their field on subjects as varied as the economics and market for grain maize, the future for maize varieties and feeding forage maize to dairy and beef cattle. Please contact the MGA office if you would like to be involved, either just to sit and listen, or by taking stand space or even presenting a paper/poster. The conference is being held at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. **Don't forget to put Thursday 25th February in your 2010 Diary.**



John Whitby, the MGA Vice Chairman organised a very successful trip to Denmark earlier this month and below is his report, which will be expanded on at next years Annual Maize Conference.

Those who attended our annual conference in Cirencester over the past two years will remember eloquent and well informed speakers from Denmark, enthusing all of us about the advanced state of maize agronomy, research and utilization in that country.

Following in the footsteps of a hugely successful tour to southern Germany in 2007, eighteen members undertook a follow-up tour of western Denmark in November. We went to try and find out what makes Danish agriculture such a force and to hear about the importance of maize in their agricultural system.

Our tour got off to a flying start with a visit to an agricultural contractor of mind-blowing scale. With 25 staff, 4 foragers and 29 tractors, we saw specialist slurry placement equipment for maize growing. It was here we started to get an insight into the draconian environmental regulations that Danish agriculture has to contend with. We learnt of strict closed periods, routine slurry injection, unforgiving N quotas (including the calculations of all inputs) and the need for cover crops. The average slurry tanker transported 31 tonnes of product!

This fantastic initial visit epitomized the rest of our tour. A pig farmer demonstrated his system using 350ha of grain maize. A maize ear only silage maker was visited, as was an organic farm incredibly, but very successfully, using a flame weeder as part of their weed control programme. Everywhere we went we saw levels of investment, commitment to agriculture and buildings and infrastructure of the highest quality.

As well looked after guests of Jysk Landbrugsrådgivning (Jutlands Farm Advisory Service), we were informed of latest results in maize variety trials and a lot more about regulation and the economics of Danish agriculture. Denmark produces enough food to feed 15 million people, with a population of five and a half million. However in doing this Danish agricultural debt is three times that of our own!

Of course no farming tour is complete without sampling some of the local hospitality and our hotel did us proud with traditional Danish food and alcohol! The whole trip was well rounded off with a day at Agromek, the renowned Nordic agricultural show.

In concluding, everyone learnt a lot on the very enjoyable trip. Watch this space for our next tour in 2011, but in the meantime if you want to find out more, contact me or come to the conference on 25th February 2010 to hear more details about our trip.



ACCURATE MAIZE ANALYSIS ON THE CARDS AT LAST

It is great to be able to report that research work aiming to standardise the equations used by those analysing maize silage has started. The LINK project, to be based at Reading university and funded by a combination of industry and DEFRA money, will involve feeding 90 half tonne maize samples from around the country to sheep. The numbers generated from the two year feeding and lab trial will be passed to all the UK silage analysis labs who will be able to produce more accurate and standard maize silage analysis results in the future. Members keen to learn more or who are prepared to help with maize silage samples should give Jean a ring in the office.



GREAT TURNOUT FOR WEST WALES MAIZE EVENTS

During the 2009 maize growing season John Morgan, following a request and financial support from the Environment Agency in Wales, has run three events focusing on the growing of sustainable maize in the far west of the principality. On-farm events in April and September focused on agronomy issues, including seedbed production, fertilisation and harvest. A follow up meeting in December concentrated on variety choice and the appropriate use of organic manures.

High turnouts were seen at most events, reflecting the interest in what is a relatively new crop in the region. The next meeting in the series will be in February where avoiding weed competition will be discussed. All are obviously welcome.



John Morgan talking through the potential to use manures to grow maize

**Gordon Newman
Travel Awards**



Briony Burge has been asked by the MGA to undertake a study into grain maize in the UK. This project is funded by the Gordon Newman Travel Award and it is hoped that it will provide useful information on growing and the marketing of grain maize. As part of the project, Briony will visit a group of farmers currently growing grain maize, for an in-depth study into the economics and practicalities of growing grain maize in the UK. The project will also focus on the market for UK grain maize for both, dried and crimped grain. Next month as part of the project, Briony is sending out a questionnaire to all members to get an idea of who is growing the crop, for what market and the areas cropped. If you could spend a little time completing this questionnaire Briony would be really grateful.

ANY ADVICE ON FRIGHTENING STARLINGS ?

I don't think anyone feeding maize silage has not been plagued with flocks of starlings at some time during the winter. Has anyone got any solutions (not shotguns!) to getting rid of them. The MGA along with the MDC did a trial using falcons a few years ago. If you have a successful and legal method, could you let me know and I will pass it on to frustrated MGA members.



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MGA ROADSHOWS 2010 – ANAEROBIC DIGESTER VISIT DATE SET FOR SEPTEMBER 7TH 2010

2009 saw the MGA attend both the European and South West dairy events, along with the Cereals event in Cambridgeshire. With the joint aims of meeting/talking to existing members and recruiting new growers the show programme is always popular.

Plans for 2010 include attendance on **Tuesday 11th May at Scot Grass**, as well as an MGA event in Nottingham where alongside an update on maize growing in the area, members will have the opportunity of a guided tour around what will be the first industrial scale maize fed anaerobic digester. The visit, to the still to be completed 2MWe plant, using 37,000 tonnes of maize a year at **Stoke Bar-dolph, is to be held on Tuesday 7th September.**

VARIETY CHOICE FOR MY FARM!-MGA CHAIRMAN'S DO IT YOURSELF APPROACH

The MGA held two open days at John Jacksons (MGA Chairman) farm on the outskirts of Nottingham last July and September. Both events were well attended and with the MGA agronomist, Simon Draper, in residence. Many MGA members were brought up to date with respect to the latest thinking on herbicide strategy, harvest dates and variety choice by Simon and others.

The backbone of the event was the 51 variety trial/demo that John put together with the help of the seed suppliers.

Varieties grown included well known ruminant feed-stock options through to specific biogas targeted varieties that have preformed well overseas.

The trial was of real quality and is proving a real asset in helping John decide which varieties are best suited to his particular situation.

The soils at Stoke Bardolph are highly fertile sandy loam and at an altitude approximately 10 metres

above sea level with the crop intended to fuel a new energy crop plant requiring 40 thousand tonnes of maize silage each year.



Considerable variations were seen between varieties in this particular good maize growing year:

Dry matter yields varied from 28.28t/ha to 16.45t/ha

ME values of 11.5 to 10

Starch values between 37.6% and 18.6%.

Starch yields from 9.8t/ha to 3.71t/ha.

As all the plots were harvested on the same day dry matters varied between 44.8% to 25%.

The variation in performance illustrates how easily farmers can get it badly wrong with respect to the following 12 months feed stock and problems cannot often be fully corrected through additional concentrates- a variety suited to your conditions along with the correct harvest date are critical.

John's advice with respect to such a trial is that it is invaluable to put varieties to the test in your own conditions and repeat them for at least 2 to 3 years. Although this sounds hard work, practically it is fairly easy if a feeder wagon can be found and the maize plots blown into it, to accurately weigh off each variety.

John plans to hold a further meeting to MGA members next September, when he will have narrowed down his choice of varieties for his particular circumstance and will take the opportunity to show you around his new energy crop plant run purely on maize silage with a little whole crop wheat.

Wholecrop profile raised – Calling all interested members

Members will hopefully be aware that the MGA has for many years covered wholecrop silage issues alongside those of maize growing producing newsletters and running meetings and a conference to keep growers informed. These initiatives were historically led by the late Colin Wright a great friend of the MGA and long-term council member. Colins MGA wholecrop work has more recently been undertaken by the office team and other interested members. Following deliberation at recent MGA council meetings it has been decided to revisit how we cater for MGA wholecrop members and a decision has been made to raise the profile of wholecrop silages within the organisation. With this in mind we are to form an MGA wholecrop silage group the remit of which will be to identify and review completed research as well as to identify and commission new work. If you have any thoughts on wholecrop silages and the MGA's role in the sector please contact the office to learn more.

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