

# MGA TIMES



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## 2015 MGA CONFERENCE

The date has been set for the MGA conference. **Thursday 26th February at the Peterborough Arena at the East of England Showground.**



Please put the date in your diaries.

Details to follow.

## FARMER MEMBERSHIP OFFER WITH ADBA

We are delighted to announce that following discussions with the membership team at the Anaerobic Digester and Biogas Association (ADBA), both before and during last month's excellent UK AD and Biogas event at the NEC, we have been able to negotiate a special reduced subscription rate for MGA **farmer** members keen to also become members of ADBA. ADBA is keen to welcome farmer members and with this in mind have agreed to reduce the associate farmer membership subscription from £250 to £150 per year. Growers keen to take up this opportunity should, in the first instance contact Jean or John in the office who will outline the next step.

## UK DAIRY DAY

The MGA have booked a stand at the UK Dairy Day on Wednesday 17th September. This is a new event in the busy Show season. The MGA Council felt it would be good for us to be there, particularly as maize harvesting will be imminent. Bring along some cobs for a discussion on harvest dates. We look forward to meeting you there.



## INTRODUCING THE NEW MGA CHAIRMAN

At the beginning of June the MGA Council appointed dairy farmer Michael Christensen to be the new Chairman. Michael takes over from Hugh McClymont, Farm Director at The Crichton Royal, Dumfries.

Before we introduce Michael, we would like to thank Hugh for his excellent chairmanship over two years. In that time Hugh hosted the European Maize Meeting at Dumfries. The delegates all went away having sampled Scotland's finest haggis and whisky, after hearing about research in each country. A successful trip to Ireland and two well attended conferences are also a result of Hugh's enthusiasm and dedication.

### Looking ahead-

Michael & his brother Neil farm at Steanbow Farm, Pilton, Glastonbury. Their father Finn is a founder member of the MGA and they have been growing maize since the early 70's. Anyone who attends the Glastonbury festival probably doesn't realise that Steanbow Farm, which is next door to Worthy Farm provides 53% of the land needed to host the festival each year. As a consequence the 530 cows are indoors all year around and maize makes up two thirds of the ration.



Michael in his maize

The Christensen family farm 1200 acres, of which 600 are rented. As well as the cows, Michael and his brother have 450,000 broiler chickens on the farm at any one time. The 320 acres of maize is grown in rotation with winter wheat. The wheat is used whole to feed the chickens and caustic soda treated for the cows. The 500 acres of grass required by the festival are cut for silage throughout the season which is more than enough for the cows.

Michael feels very passionately that maize has a vital role to play in the success of their business. Having grown some of their maize under plastic for the first time this year, he is convinced that plastic has an impact on quality and yield. He is also keen that we do not forget that wholecrop cereals are an important feed, especially where maize doesn't prosper and late harvesting is an issue.

Michael is keen to promote the Maize Growers Association wherever and whenever he can.

We look forward to the next two years with him at the helm.

By the way, if you are ever short of wellington boots and camping equipment, the Christensen family have enough left from the festival to supply MGA members!!



After everyone has left!

**MAIZE VARIETY PANEL MEETING**



Early June saw a four man MGA team represent the association at the annual Maize Varieties panel meeting held in the NIAB/TAG offices, Cambridge. The aim of the panel is to allocate maize varieties, or to be correct hybrids, tested via the descriptive list system, a place on either the first or second choice variety lists for favourable and non favourable areas. This year Graeme Cock joined Simon Draper, John Cottle and John Morgan, sitting alongside four representatives of the British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB), who fund the variety testing programme and four independent specialists. While a fixed system, derived following regular revision over the years, allocates most of the varieties to one list or the other, there are always those that do not clearly fit any one list and this is where the panel discussions take place. Each discussion focuses on the official data, which is ably supplied and supported by the key NIAB/TAG team members and continues until a consensus is reached, or vote is taken as to where a particular variety should fit. Chairing all this is Brendan Paul who does an excellent job in ensuring all views are aired, as well as keeping things moving. If all is well, the meeting is over by lunchtime and members can head home for another year. If however decisions prove unsatisfactory for the breeders concerned, then they have the right to appeal, which necessitates a repeat trip out east in late July to revisit the discussions. The panel provides a fascinating insight into the new genetics coming to market and is the first step towards the production of the ever popular MGA Recommended Variety list of new hybrids, that comes out in December each year. While at this stage of the year it is not possible to release individual hybrid data, (information is embargoed until September) it is pleasing to be able to report that yet again steps have been taken to increase yield and quality averages of the hybrids on the list, so that growers can expect even more from the top varieties next year.

It was with some sadness and reluctance that having attended the dairy event for many years the MGA council this year decided that it was time for change and as a consequence there was no MGA stand at the NEC hosted livestock event. Instead we walked down the hall and set up shop at the Anaerobic Digester and Biogas Association show, where John Morgan and Simon Draper spent two days talking to trade representatives and farmers hoping to learn as much about Anaerobic Digestion and maize as possible. The change in show proved to be a success, with several very useful contacts being made. Stand discussions ranged from feedstock characteristics to digestate use and everything in between. It continues to surprise both Simon and John that developers seem prepared to commit such large sums of money, without full consideration of the feedstock's they need to grow and digestate they need to spread back to land. Having worked in the conservative (with a small c) world of agriculture for many years, it was fascinating to spend a couple of days in such a young and dynamic industry. We calculated 5 stand staff for every Anaerobic Digester working in the UK, which suggests that not all will remain involved in a couple of years when the industry settles down. It will be very interesting to see how things develop.

**BASIS & NROSO POINTS**

Following a request from an MGA member we have now been allocated 4 BASIS points & 2 NROSO points for membership of the Maize Growers Association. If you would like the reference numbers, please give me a ring in the MGA Office on 01363 775040.



**MGA MAIZE UNDER PLASTIC VARIETY TRIAL**

In previous emails we have written of the establishment of the first MGA maize under plastic variety trials on three sites in the UK. A meeting last week with Mat Shine of SAMCO, who have set up and are running the trials on our behalf, provide a good opportunity for an update on progress. Matt was pleased to report that all trials continue to develop and that even with some minor water damage to the North Wales site, results of the replicated trials should still provide really good yield and quality data comparisons. The three sites are located in South and North Wales plus South west Scotland. Ten varieties, put forward by the industry as suitable, are on test. Results will be made available to growers pre next year's growing season.



Variety trials being drilled with the SAMCO two row trials machine on the South Wales site

**DRILL**  
 Westerwolds  
 Italian Ryegrass  
 Forage Rape  
 Stubble Turnips  
 Forage Rye  
**NOW**  
 For extra winter feed

**MAIZE PROGRESS AROUND THE COUNTRY**

A ring around the MGA council members proved interesting. Stephen Temple and Oliver Knowland (both in the East) reported a promising start, although some crops were checked after a frost on 3rd May. John Jackson in Nottingham is pleased with his maize drilled this year using the Vaderstad Tempo drill linked to Trimble satellite. The new drill has auto seed shut off, which means no double drilling and significant seed saving. John is anticipating bumper yields if this fine weather continues. John Whitby, farming near London and Hugh McClymont in Dumfries are also anticipating a good harvest.

Neil Groom, who travels the width and breadth of the country reports “maize crops look very good all

around the country with a warm spring and sufficient rain. Weed control has been excellent, and applications of pre-emergents have definitely paid off. With full grass clamps and good prospect for maize harvest, being able to build up forage

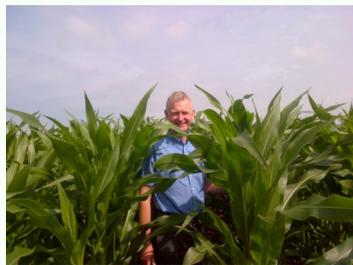


Photo taken on 11th July

stocks will improve winter feeding possibilities. Consider re-seeding some extra fields this season to benefit from new leys and improvements to soil pH, soil structure and control of weeds”.

The maize here at Town Barton is now tasselling (24th July), although I have seen some poorish maize in mid Devon that looks like it has suffered from compaction (not an MGA member!).

**MAIZE EYESPOT AND VARIETY SUSCEPTIBILITY**

NIAB have been conducting trials into maize eyespot varietal susceptibility which are now in their third year, funded by the BSPB (British Society for Plant Breeders), with a little help from the MGA. The research team have carried out the trials at Cambridge, where the crops were inoculated with maize eyespot spores (originally obtained from a crop in Devon) and then irrigated twice a week if necessary to ensure the wet conditions required for the spread of the disease. Currently they have managed to get up to 25% infection on the leaf and so have got some good high levels of eyespot present.

In September, BSPB variety disease ratings will be released. The data suggests that there does appear to be differences between varieties which are not correlated to environmental conditions or harvest dates. The results will be very useful as if there is a genetic link then it will be possible to breed for resistance to this disease holding out hope that the threat of eyespot could be much diminished in future years.

**What about control now?**

Unless you have been having lots of rain then it does appear that the disease is only developing slowly (even if it developing quickly at NIAB) in most parts of the country and so for the time being it should be a 'wait and see' approach particularly if the crop is now requiring a contractor for a fungicide application.

Assuming you are going to need a high ground clearance sprayer to get through the crop, then if the disease does develop with noticeable levels (easily seen) on the majority of plants, at the end of August then spraying should be considered at this point, even if the crop is going to be knocked down by the sprayer when travelling. Even then crops should only be sprayed if the forecast is for cool wet showery conditions throughout September.

**CALL FOR RESEARCH IDEAS!**

As members will no doubt know, each year the MGA commission a series of small plot research trials, the aim of which is to identify opportunities to improve the performance and utilisation of maize and wholecrop be it for silage, grain or anaerobic digester feedstock. Decisions as to which subjects to investigate are discussed at MGA council meetings, with ideas matched to budget in February each year.

**This year's small plot trials are summarised in the table below.**

Pre, Post and sequential herbicide work	32 treatments looking at different chemical mixes/rates targeted at achieving excellent weed control at minimum cost.
Weed control in maize grown under plastic	The first MGA trial looking at weed control in plastic covered maize with 6 treatments.
Fungicide	10 treatments are being tested for the effectiveness of minimising the impact of maize eyespot.
Sulphur	Logically maize should require sulphur in similar quantities to other crops. This trial will see if it does.
Bird deterrent	The reduction of seed dressing options for maize has prompted this look-see at alternative bird deterrents.

In addition to the small plot work, we continue to part fund trials being run by NIAB looking at varietal susceptibility to maize eyespot, as well as being partners in the DEFRA funded, two site, project looking into minimising the environmental impact of maize growing via strip tillage and the use of overwintered cover crops. This year we are also looking at maize varieties grown under plastic, in conjunction with SAMCO.

The purpose of this note is to not only remind members of how your subscriptions are being spent, but also to ask what areas of research you would like us to consider in the coming year. Should we focus on disease issues, row spacing, fertiliser, and/or establishment? Should we be thinking about something very different? Please let us know your thoughts however way out they may be. While we cannot promise to undertake research in all the areas, we do promise to read and seriously consider all your suggestions.