



EVENT REVIEW – APRIL 2022 MGA CONFERENCE MINI SUMMARY JOHN MORGAN – MGA OFFICE

'OK, so, where to start?!' – my immediate reaction when Sarah (MGA head of delegation!!) asked me to write a review of the 2022 MGA conference! Having calmed down a little I quickly realised that this ask gave me a legitimate opportunity to revisit what were two busy morning, online and recorded, sessions jam-packed with useful and interesting info. In fact, I am now looking forward to it!

The first of the two morning Zoom session took place on the 22nd February with the 140+ registered delegates offered papers ranging from climate change and weather monitoring, MGA trial result reviews to practical farmer experiences growing maize.

Before going further, all at the MGA would like to thank conference sponsors Samco systems, BASF and Vaderstad for their support along with Yara who sponsored the conference papers, copies of which are available from the MGA website.



Review of the Papers

Samco Systems sponsor message – First up on day one was a 5-minute update from Matthew Shine on company developments as well as an introduction to the new compostable films.



Prof Steve Dorling - University of East Anglia's Prof Steve Dorling kicked off the first technical session of the conference with a review of his and others work focused on climate modelling. Fantastic graphics to illustrate the impact of climate change so far before Steve looked ahead to model future opportunities/challenges. Recent impact assessment work, looking at future opportunities for Viticulture with a changed climate, were used to illustrate what is to come. Viticulture was used as heat unit requirements are comparable with maize growing.

MGA Cover Crop Competition Results – Next up I took the opportunity to review the photographs submitted as entries. Thanks go to all who took the trouble to send in photos and stories. Some great examples of how many of you are doing the right thing! I know Sarah is reviewing the

competition in more detail elsewhere in this mailing so no more on this from me.

MGA South West Trial Site Review – Next up was a review of the results of the South West Trial site, set up to test some of the agronomy lessons learnt elsewhere in the country, in the more fertile, higher organic matter, wetter soils of the west. Starter fertiliser and different nitrogen fertilisers were considered as was undersowing with Italian Rye Grass (IRG) and mechanical weed control. A copy of the full trial report, including results and photographs plus a first look at the maize and bean companion cropping, is available electronically from the MGA office.

Nick Sheppard's Farmer Thoughts – Farms and Estate Manager Nick from Upton Suffolk Farms took us on a tour of the estates diversified enterprise mix including vegetables (potatoes, carrots and onions) anaerobic digestion and feed stock crops (maize and energy rye) plus woodland and countryside stewardship schemes. Nick focused on the role of green cover crops to boost soil organic matter and outlined how maize is grown and use of digestate, both solid and liquid, is optimised with the aid of some great photos and video. Nick is a practicing 'Strip Tiller' and it was good to hear of the good and not so good results of the farm trial work as well as learn about irrigation on the farm. One of Nick's paper conclusions was that he still has lots to learn about maize growing. Join the club Nick and thank you once again for a great presentation.

Mole Valley Farmers – Good friend and long-term supporter of the MGA, John Lawrence from Mole Valley Farmers took the second sponsors slot to update members on the company's mineral offer focusing on the potential of Calci BupH to replace limestone flour and Bicarb in livestock rations.



Dr Jens Erik Jensen – from Denmark took to the screen next with an excellent introduction to and review of the 'Mechanical Weed Control in maize' work he and colleagues continue to work on. The rationale for mechanical weed control was followed by a review of the machinery used and results from

trials. Jens concluded his paper with a look into the future with a focus on robotic weed identification and control. Jen's paper is a must read for those wanting to get up to speed fast with the various mechanical weed control options.

Jon Myhill – Day one was concluded by MGA Agronomist and Council member Jon Myhill. Jon took members through the MGA Small Plot Herbicide Trial results focusing on the pre, post and sequential herbicide options and including the ever-popular Star Rating Tables for actives and weeds. In addition, Jon talked through the extensive maize Undersowing Trial where alternatives to grass were undersown and monitored during the maize growing season and beyond.

Day 2 of this year's MGA conference took place, again online via Zoom, on the 8th of March.

Iain Ford – Proceedings got underway with Iain Ford from conference sponsors BASF providing an update on Comet 200, their maize fungicide that tackles diseases in the crop.



John Williams – Following the release of the interpretation of the Farming Rules for Water, by the Environment Agency, in the summer of 2021 John and colleagues were asked by the AHDB and others to review the impact of the legislation on the industry. For the MGA conference John, having highlighted the very real issue of water pollution from agriculture, outlined the key elements of this impact assessment as well as how best to make the most of the nutrients contained within organic manures. John's paper concluded with the very useful 'Suggested matrix for the responsible use of organic manures materials' generated as a conclusion of ADAS's review of the Farming Rules for Water.

Neil Groom – The job of setting out the key results of the MGA small plot trials programme fell to MGA Council member Neil Groom. Trials covered included:

- Post winter wheat/pre-maize cover crop options including results from 19/20 and 20/21
- Drilling date and depth trials from the last three years
- Maize fungicide trials

Dr Sajjad Awan – Sajjad took his opportunity when speaking to members to introduce the idea, and CF fertilisers service, of soil testing for Soil Mineral Nitrogen and Additional Available Nitrogen (AAN) to better quantify Soil Nitrogen Supply (SNS). The novel testing during which soil organic matter is quantified in terms of nitrogen available for future crop use appears to offer significant scope to better quantify soil available nitrogen, a challenge that has been very difficult to do until now. The MGA continue to work with Sajjad to better understand the benefits of soil nitrogen testing to maize growing members.

Rowland Dines – After a coffee break, Vaderstad, via Rowland, used their slot as conference sponsors to talk us through the features of their Tempo maize drill before sharing an excellent promotional video of the machine in action.



Jon Myhill – MGA agronomist Jon returned to our virtual podium to talk through the results of the biostimulant and fertiliser trials undertaken by the MGA during 2021. Starter fertiliser and biostimulant alternatives were compared before Jon moved on to review work focused on better understanding maize nitrogen requirements alongside the potential of nitrogen inhibitor products. Jon concluded his presentation with take home messages for members.

Prof Andy Neal – Our last presentation was provided by friend of the MGA Andy Neal. Andy, this time around, had been asked to increase our understanding of soil organic matter/soil carbon and importantly the benefits of increased levels of soil organic matter to the agricultural production levels of land. We were educated as to how carbon gets in to soil, its importance as being the heart of the soil system and the impact carbon has on soil nitrogen. Throughout his paper Andy worked to the theme of using soil carbon for the benefit it brings to agricultural production.

The conference sessions, managed on the day by MGA chairman John Jackson and organised by Sarah from the MGA office team proved once again to be educational, thought provoking and for the most part very practical.

Copies of all the papers are available to members via the MGA Website. Video recordings of the conferences are also available via Sarah at the MGA office info@maizegrowersassociation.co.uk