

MGA TIMES



MGA 1988 - 2008 (so far!)
 20 years of independant advice for farmers



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BIOGAS BUBBLE CONTINUES TO GROW!

Members will no doubt have read the latest in the Farmers Weekly re the business case for biogas production. The MGA has also played its part in spreading the news, being co hosts alongside SLR consulting and Creedy Associates of a Seminar held at the Langford House nr Bristol on the 12th March. The seminar was chaired by MGA vice chairman John Jackson.

The seminar to which over 60 people attended aimed to take the subject to the “next” level with papers being presented on subjects such as the science and technology of the process, municipal and industrial waste feedstock’s, planning issues, use of digestate and capital funding. Speakers moved forward from explaining the AD process generally into detailed reviews of the nitty gritty. Most interesting perhaps were the papers presented by David Taylor of Smartest energy and the representative from Augusta Ltd. Both had real enthusiasm for the technology and its future role in producing renewable energy. While we in the office still await full copies of the papers presented, members keen to know more are encouraged to phone or drop us an email so that we can send on more information when we have it.



As I write this on 14th April, the soil temperature at Town Barton Farm is still only 6.2 °C. Maize drilling in this part of the country will be quite a lot later than last year, where we had a heat-wave in April and a monsoon after that!



MGA 2008 CONFERENCE REPORT



Members will be pleased to receive copies in this mailing of the papers presented at last months MGA annual conference. The circulation of the papers has been made possible by the generous sponsorship of the papers by Syngenta Seeds.

This years conference was a great success with a wide range of papers focusing on the growth and use of maize as well as future predictions re the fortunes of the UK dairy sector. A welcome re-introduction was the inclusion of a foreign speaker in proceedings. Martin Mikkelsen from the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service spoke frankly about Maize Growing in Denmark. Growing conditions are similar in Denmark to the UK so issues such as variety choice, seed bed preparation, maize harvest and earlage all proved interesting and relevant. Ken Boynes, Chief Executive of the Milk Development Council had very kind words to say about the MGA, offering the organisation support both in principle and financially during his paper. Kens focus was UK Dairy farming prospects for the next 10 years, he focused on supply and demand situation for dairy farming inputs and outputs and perhaps surprisingly for some on the linkage between climate change and agriculture.

The days events were closed not by a farm walk which has been a feature of the conference for the last couple of years but by a presentation by MGA Vice chairman John Jackson who reviewed the lessons learnt during the MGA trip to Germany last December. (See photograph)

DEMONSTRATION SITE FINAL MEETING – DEALING WITH COMPACTION

MGA RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

A relatively small number of keen individuals braved what was a cold day at the final demonstration site meeting at the English Catchment Sensitive Farming/ MGA demo site on Troy Stuart's land near Exeter.

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The meeting organised by ADAS on behalf of the Catchment Sensitive Farming project was addressed by MGA team members Simon Draper and John Morgan. Simon's focus was on assessing soil structure issues associated with a late harvested maize field where, as John focused on using organic manures to supply as much of the next crop nutrient requirements as is practically possible.

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Following a short "classroom" type session where the pro's and cons of starter fertiliser amongst other things were discussed, we moved to the field to dig holes, identify compaction and review manure plots. The good news on site was that while the sandy soil is prone to harvest related machinery compaction, little was found, probably due to the excellent, dry travelling conditions experienced during harvest last November as well as Troy's tracked combine and double axcelled feed bin????? trailer. Simon explained to the group how to identify and measure the depth of compaction and to use this measurement to set up a subsoiler correctly. A subsoiler was on hand to put this theory into practice.

Slurry plots focused on appropriate application rates of slurry to supply crop phosphate and potash requirements while limiting the loss of nutrient as a result of over application. John talked of a 50 m3 application rate of typical 6% dairy slurry applying sufficient P & K for most maize crops and suggested that use of the MGA N predictor would provide a good recommendation as to the nitrogen needed to meet crop requirements.

At February's MGA council meeting members reviewed the proposed R & D programme for the coming year. Proposed trials included:-

- 1 Further herbicide work featuring pre and post emergence treatments and minimal rates to achieve satisfactory weed control
2. Starter fertiliser trials – looking at the justification for starter fertiliser at different soil indexes and the use of micro granules as an alternative.
- 3 Nitrogen trails to amongst other things back up the MGA's view that maize requires more Nitrogen than DEFRA's RB 209 recommends.
- 4 Fungicide trials – looking at the potential to use chemical treatments to control eyespot in maize.
- 5 Seed Dressings – repeating work completed in recent years to confirm the apparent yield benefit of using some of the new seed dressings.

The trials protocols have already been sent to contractors and companies wishing to enter treatments into the trials. Results will be made available this autumn and at next years annual conference.

Simon's article this month highlights the conditions for establishing the maize plant and the pre-emergent sprays available, in the next issue he will talk about the post emergence spray applications. Please do not hesitate to call the office if you need any help or advice with drilling or spraying this years maize crop.

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