

# MGA TIMES

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## WHOLECROP CONFERENCE

### Wholecrop Conference & Farm Walk, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Feb

Full details of the Wholecrop Conference and pre-conference farm walk have already been sent to members. **Have you booked your place yet?**

Chaired by Jonathan Blake and kindly sponsored by HSBC and the MDC, the Conference features papers from Steve Ellwood (Head of Agriculture, HSBC), Andrew Shakeshaft, (MGA member and farmer), Mike Slater (Terra Nitrogen) and Will Armitage (Farm Manager to Peter Dixon Smith, Lyons Herd) with subjects covering UK dairy farming in the global market, exploitation of the value of farm generated nutrients in wholecrop production, the use of wholecrop forages in a farm system and experience from a high yielding herd utilising fermented and high dry matter wholecrop and maize.

In addition to these papers the current MDC dairy and beef trials with fermented & 'alkalage' wholecrop, being undertaken at Harper Adams, will be reported and delegates given the opportunity to visit these trials.

The Conference is preceded by a farm meeting the previous afternoon at Andrew Shakeshaft's

## MAIZE CONFERENCE

### Annual MGA Conference – 'Which Forage for Profit?' - incorporating visit to Kemble farms

As promised, a fresh approach for the MGA's Maize Conference this year:- A full and varied morning programme dealing with technical and practical aspects of maize and complimentary forages, incorporating an afternoon farm walk to promote practical discussion. The new format promises to provide 'something for everyone.'

Featuring Andrew Shakeshaft (MGA member) sharing his experience of utilising maize and wholecrop in his farming system; Pete Kelly (Consultant) providing an economic and nutritional appraisal of maize, wholecrop wheat (fermented, urea & 'alkalage') and grass, and giving some key indicators/measures to assess which forage makes best use of a farms main resource – land **plus** guest speaker Dirk Zaaier MRCVS from The Netherlands sharing his views on nutrition and fertility for dairy cows (continuing discussion in practical terms at Kemble farm). There will also be two Gordon Newman Travel Award papers plus a summary of the MGA's 2002 trials, focussing mainly on environmental issues.

*The full programme and booking form is enclosed.*

For the first time ever this Conference is open to non-MGA members so please 'bring a friend.' There is a higher fee payable for non-members but this will be discounted from a year's membership subscription if they join on the day. Please note that only members will be able to receive the FULL MGA trials data.

farm, providing the opportunity to view and discuss the feeding system operated by Andrew for his 170 cows plus followers.

Dinner, accommodation & breakfast for those who are travelling some distance and wish to attend both the farm walk and Conference can be arranged.

Please send in your booking form/s as soon as possible in order to secure your place/s, if you have mislaid this information please telephone Noelle at the office who will be pleased to supply details.

## VARIETY CHOICE / NIAB

### Simplified choices

We hope you are finding your MGA Variety Booklets useful - please let us know if you have any comments.

## NIAB

We are pleased to report that, following proposals from MGA, future NIAB lists will be simpler and easier to understand, with one list produced, as opposed to the many there are at present, and all data comparable.

## MEETING REPORTS

### Features of recent MGA meetings in the South West

#### 1) Maize and Graze

Maize and Graze 'a truly simple system' was the title for the recent visit to Town Barton Farm, near Crediton, run by MGA member David Munday and his sister Jean Howard. MGA members were given an outline of the system for the 140 cow dairy, plus followers and beef.

Many of our members supply over half their winter forage as maize but at Town Barton visitors were shown a winter forage diet of 75% maize and 25% fermented wholecrop wheat, with 1500 kg per cow per year of concentrates.

The basis of the system for the predominantly autumn calving herd is graze as much lowest cost grass from mid March to September (no grass silage is made) and the winter forage is supplied as the next lowest cost feed in the form of maize silage and wholecrop wheat.

The visit provided a confidence building exercise for those who might consider more maize in the winter diet. Diet protein levels were lower than normal at 14 – 15% and the high energy forage system produced peak yields of 35 kg in a flattish lactation curve of over 7500 kg per cow in herd.

The farm also maximises the value of home produced manures to grow maize and wholecrop wheat in the rotation. Many in the South West will have heard the virtues of this system conveyed to maize growers through the support of David Munday, John Morgan and Brian Pain who also contributed to this visit.

The MGA's thanks to David and Jean for showing us the benefits of maize in this simple system.

After the farm visit the local cricket club provided a picturesque setting for Chris Savery to stress the value of 'maximising forage energy' as we had seen earlier 'lets have at least 60% of the daily dry matter intake from forage for high yielders' was Chris's message.

## 2) Fertility and Nutrition

The subject of 'Fertility and Nutrition' was given good coverage at a joint meeting between the MGA and the Orchard Veterinary Group, Glastonbury, jointly chaired by MGA Chairman, Charles Moore

and Martin Green MRCVS, partner in the Orchard Practice.

Martin addressed the issue of 'fertility – why is it such a problem? – why are modern cows more difficult?' The breeding problems faced by many farmers were illustrated using national and practice data produced by Dick Esslemont. Emphasis was placed on attention to detail with regard to weight loss and cow condition and aspects of management that ensure consistently high energy intakes.

Chris Savery supported the veterinary comments with his paper on 'maximising forage energy' which stressed the value of consistently well made forages, highlighting the value of maize and wholecrop cereals and an overall feeding policy linked and fully discussed with veterinary practitioners.

This same philosophy will be developed at the MGA Conference 'Which Forage for Profit?' on the 26<sup>th</sup> February (at the Royal Agricultural College), by Dr Dirk Zaaijer in a paper and discussion at the Kemble farms afternoon visit.

***Don't miss this one!***

*Angus Golightly*

## ORGANIC MAIZE

### Organic maize success

Members have indicated that they find it interesting to read about other farmers' situations and we are therefore always keen to share the experiences and successes of fellow maize growers.

Gordon Tweddle, MGA member and a past MGA Chairman, converted to an organic system about four years ago. We are pleased to report that this venture did prove successful as the enclosed article, taken from the Soil Association's Journal for Organic Agriculture and Horticulture, shows.

## FUTURE INFORMATION

### What next from the MGA?

The two conferences, being held in February, are the next major events for MGA. We have made every effort to make these conferences as varied and comprehensive as possible, in order to provide something for everybody. The papers from both events will be available to all members but extra benefit can be gained through taking part in active practical discussion with other farmers, consultants etc. and we therefore hope that as many members as possible will be able to attend.

## MAILINGS

February's mailing will include a financial article regarding maize and its current state in the UK – should maize be grown for silage or grain? We will also be re-introducing the farmer focus articles, featuring a past MGA Maize Silage Competition winner to see what they are doing now, how their system may have changed etc.

## MAIZE GROWING GUIDE

We are currently in the process of updating the MGA's Maize Growing Guide. The updated version of this publication will be **THE comprehensive reference for maize growers**, including advice based on the results of the many independent replicated trials carried out by the MGA over the years.

The guide will automatically be sent to all members - in the meantime Simon Draper will continue to produce timely and topical technical notes, such as the enclosed, to help with current decisions and forward planning for this year's crop.

*Please note, if you would prefer to receive mailings by email simply forward your email address with this request to Noelle (mga1@globalnet.co.uk).*

