

MGA TIMES



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Having just had an MGA member asking about the N Predictor form, they will be sent out with the next mailing in February. If anyone requires one sooner, please ring the office. 01363 775040

HEALTHY WHOLECROP-7th February 2007

There is still time to book your place at this year's wholecrop conference being held at Harper Adams University College. This venue has proven popular over the years, being situated in the heart of a livestock and wholecrop silage growing area. The theme is "Healthy Wholecrop", with specialists reviewing their findings and opinions on the role wholecrops can play in balanced ruminant diets. For added interest, we have asked Lucy Lewis from Greenfinch Ltd to review Biogas production from agricultural crops & wastes. As usual with MGA conferences, the day rounds off with a practical afternoon session looking at the work going on at the college farm. As outlined in the programme, the farm is looking to expand the dairy unit as well as maintaining the mixed farming portfolio. Dr Liam Sinclair will also be on hand to outline the current research projects being undertaken. The full itinerary is included within this mailing.



MAIZE CONFERENCE-21st February 2007

You will find, within this mailing, a full invitation to this year's national MGA maize conference. A sense of deja-vu may come over you as you note a couple of repetitions from last year. We can assure you that this is no clerical error, but a wish to re-visit these areas. The first revisit, following a big response from last years delegates, is to energy production from maize. Owen Yeatman, who has now finished his Nuffield Scholarship, will update us on his 2006 findings and the progress with his own on-farm digester. The second revisit is to Hartpury as a venue. The college managed the conference very efficiently last year and the new dairy unit provided plenty of discussion points. Since April of last year, Velcourt Ltd have taken on the management of the unit with all the challenges it posed. It will be very interesting to see how things have developed. The re-visits plus full line up of other speakers, the full breakdown of whom is contained on the invitation, should make for a really thought provoking day.



BARRIE BRYER

Our treasurer for the last 11 years, Barrie Bryer has announced his intention to retire at this years Annual General Meeting in May. Barrie has worked tirelessly over the years to keep the finances of the MGA on an even keel. Despite the general depression in agriculture the Maize Growers Association still has an important role and a strong influence in the future development of maize and wholecrop in the UK. The strength of the MGA is due to having a very active, enthusiastic council. The lynch pin of the council for many years has been Barrie Bryer. Knowing of Barrie's keen interest in the Send a Cow project we thought that rather than the traditional retirement gift we would organise a collection, amongst members, the ultimate result of which would be a donation to the project. For those of you who are unaware of the charity, Send a Cow is a Christian charity that enables poor farmers in Africa to become self-reliant by providing them with livestock, training and advice. If you would like to contribute to the pot please fill in the donation form enclosed or phone Send a cow on 0845 660 4670 Thank you



GO GO MAIZE!!

George Bush's 2007 State of the Union address earlier this week will not go unnoticed by those trying to gauge the fortunes of agriculture in the next decade. He has doubled the targets for ethanol production to 35 billion gallons by 2017 and by so doing has pumped further enthusiasm into the rapidly expanding renewable fuels sector in the US.



While this renewed interest in agriculture should be looked on positively there are a few doubts. The main one being the ability of US farmers to deliver the required tonnage of maize. As you can imagine, efforts are being doubled to boost crop yields by every means possible. It is estimated that an area of 129,000 square miles of extra maize is needed to supply the ethanol plants. This apparently equates to the combined area of Iowa and Kansas!

Other unknowns will be the impact of such a rapid expansion on other sectors.

Concern has already been voiced regarding the future price of soya for example. With analysts predicting prices topping the highs of the 1970's as demand continues to increase and the area cropped with soya shrinking as a result of the increased maize plantings.

One thing appears certain, arable farmers can look forward with a little more enthusiasm than has been the case in the recent past.

We have had some good news at Town Barton Farm, after nearly a year of TB restrictions the Vet has finally confirmed that we are free to sell animals on the open market. There has only ever been one case of confirmed TB here, but the inconclusives keep cropping up. The most frustrating thing for anyone having these problems (we are lucky, some neighbours have had to destroy large numbers of their cows) is there is nothing much we can do to prevent TB from reoccurring at the next test.

Town Barton's silage stocks are holding up better than we expected, partly due to the mild winter (so far). This year, due to surplus grass in the early spring we have included grass silage in the dairy cow ration. The milk quality this winter has been as good as we have known it. This is partly due to a shift in calving pattern, the inclusion of some longer fibre and a desire to produce more milk (concentrate use has increased this year). The jury is out on the economics of this policy.

We are looking forward to seeing you at the forthcoming MGA conferences.

NVZ-NITROGEN LOADING LIMITS

As you may or may not be aware, the Nitrogen loading figures on Arable land for farms in NVZ's changed last month from 210kgN/ha to 170kgN/ha. The loading for grassland remains the same at 250kgN/ha.

This change will be more significant for farms growing arable forage crops (e.g. maize & wholecrops) than all grass units.

To calculate the manure N capacity for your farm, you need to identify the areas of grass and arable land on your holding, remembering to subtract the areas of ponds/lakes/hardstandings within fields.

To illustrate this, we can work through a simple example: -
A dairy farm with 50ha grass and 50ha maize/wholecrop, and stocked with 190 good-sized Holsteins.

The manure Nitrogen capacity of this farm will now be: -

Grass	50ha X 250kgN = 12,500kg N per year
Plus	
Arable	50ha X 170kgN = 8,500kg N per year

Total manure N capacity = 21,000kg N per year.
Last year that would have been 23,000kg.

We now calculate the manure N produced on the holding: -
From the NVZ guidance notes, it states that each 650kg cow will excrete 116kgN/year

190 cows X 116kgN = 22,040kgN/year.

Total manure N produced = 22,040kg N per year.

We can now see from this simple example that in 2007 this farm will exceed its manure N loading by 1040kg N, whereas last year it would have been within the limits.

This farm will now have 3 choices: -

1. Reduce stock numbers
2. Increase available land area
3. Export some manure from the holding

Please remember that if you are in an NVZ, the regulations are now linked to your single payment so any breaches can penalise you, so get the figures right!

Full guidance on this can be found in your NVZ guidance notes.

Remember! Please do not confuse these farm Nitrogen loading figures with the Total N application limits on a per field basis.

For more information, please consult your Masstock contact or call Brendan Paul on 01280 848848

MANURES “OPPORTUNITIES OR OVERLOAD!”

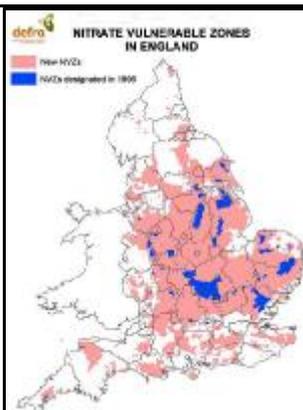
John Morgan of the MGA office team asks why some maize growers continue to squander the opportunity to save money. Now is the time of year that manures and slurry get applied, or often **over** applied to maize ground. I say over applied as it this over application, along with soil compaction and the resultant flooding or soil erosion, which is part of the reason maize growing continues to generate bad press.

- **Saving cost** Maize, being a relatively late crop to establish, provides an ideal opportunity for winter/spring applications of slurry and manure. Combine this ideal application window (late winter/spring application of manures offers the best opportunity to utilise the nutrients it contains) with the fact that maize crop nutrient requirements are in a similar ratio to those contained within standard manure analysis, it is not surprising that maize is considered to be an ideal crop on which to spread manures. In short, using manures to grow maize offers an ideal opportunity to save on expensive fertiliser.
- **So what is the problem with maize and nutrient loss?** Quite simply, the very real problems associated with nutrient leaching and direct field run-off are down to application rates. Too many of us put too much on. Why, you may ask, would people spread twice as much fertiliser on a field as the crop needs? Believe me this does happen. We often receive application rate feedback from farmers attending manure management workshops which, when worked through, indicate they have supplied twice as much nutrient as the crop needs. I suspect the over application is down to two things, being convenience/need and ignorance of the nutrient content of what has been spread.
- **Convenience/Need** Manure storage (particularly slurry) is at a premium, often as the result of increased stock numbers as well as the storage of huge amounts of dirty water (another subject for another time). Economic pressure has often meant that storage has not kept pace with livestock expansion and as a consequence, farmers have welcomed the opportunity of a “sacrifice” maize field on which they end up spreading huge amounts of manure as a waste disposal solution.
- **Ignorance** Contrary to a popular miss-conception, manures contain useful quantities of bagged fertiliser equivalent nutrients (in standard slurry 90% of the Potash is in a similar format to that purchased in a bag). These nutrients will grow crops just as well as bagged fertiliser. Many growers are not aware of these facts, perhaps because much of the crop nutrient advice comes from those with a commercial interest in selling fertiliser. We have found, having run over 80 workshops with approximately 1600 farmer attendees, that once aware of the facts, farmers are very happy to change.
- **So what to do in 2007** With the start of a new year I would urge you to accept the bad light in which maize is viewed and act upon it. I would encourage you to apply manures with crop nutrient requirements in mind and I suspect you will be amazed at the opportunities and savings that may result.

In the February mailing, we will send out a technical note putting some figures in to the equations. In the mean time, be aware of (and record) your application rates so you can make some real financial savings.

John Morgan, while being very much involved in MGA, works along with others as part of the Creedy Associates Practical Use of Manures team.

Creedy Associates run farmer workshops, aiming to increase farmers' awareness to the fertiliser potential and legislation issues associated with the use of manures.



WHOLE COUNTRY NVZ???????

Exactly 12 months ago we wrote a piece on the expected proposals for changes in the NVZ legislation following a “pre-consultation consultation”.

Since then many things have happened (the earth has got warmer, supermarkets have got bigger etc etc.), but no word from Defra on what they might have in store for us, only plenty of speculation. The whole of England becoming an NVZ has been talked about, although this would require even further consultation. Without fuelling the speculation even more, we will keep all members updated on any new proposals as they appear and the implications they will have to those concerned.