



# MGA TIMES

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

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VARIETY BOOKLET	MGA's 20th YEAR ANNUAL MAIZE CONFERENCE	
<p><b>MGA VARIETY BOOK-LET 2008.</b>                      Within in this mailing is the MGA flagship publication containing the all important variety tables. Not only are there tables for forage maize, but also listings for the ever-growing Grain Maize market. Details on choosing the correct maturity class are included, as well as an article by Chris Savery (MGA nutritionist) on choosing the correct variety for your feeding system.</p>	<p>This year's maize conference returns to the Royal Agriculture College, Cirencester on Thursday 28th February 2008.                      As well as an array of stimulating speakers, covering all interest areas of maize as listed below; we will also be introducing our new sponsors LloydsTSB.                      In addition we will be featuring a new session in the conference called "Short and Sweet", where delegates will hear all that is new in UK maize growing and feeding for 2008 from a selection of MGA commercial members.                      We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at what is always a valuable and thought-provoking event. Just send back the reply slip at the bottom of the invite enclosed within this mailing.</p> 	
<p><b>VARIETY REVIEW</b></p> <p>In an attempt to take a new look at some of the key elements of maize growing, we are delighted this month to include the enclosed technical note put together by John Burgess, a student at the Royal Agricultural College Cirencester, who has revisited varietal differences and provided us with his view on the options.</p> <p>Members keen to hear more from John will no doubt be pleased to know that he is due to speak at the MGA conference, at Cirencester in February.</p>	<p><b>Speakers already confirmed: -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>q <b>Ken Boyns - (Chief Executive Milk Development Council) - UK</b> Dairy farming prospects over the next 10 years!!!!</li> <li>q <b>Simon Draper (MGA Agronomist) - MGA Research Review inc</b> seed dressings, weed control, forage and grain maize varieties and the economics of fertiliser.</li> <li>q <b>Hugh McClymont - (Chrichton Royal Farm, Scotland) -</b> Growing maize in marginal areas including maize under plastic and grain maize.</li> <li>q <b>Martin Mikkelsen (Danish Agricultural Advisory Service) –</b> Lessons to be learned from Danish maize research.</li> <li>q <b>John Burgess (RAC Student) -</b> Results of his UK Grain Maize survey conducted during 2007.</li> <li>q <b>John Jackson (MGA Vice Chairman) –</b>MGA Biogas tour of Germany 2007</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>THE DAIRY EVENT—SHEPTON MALLET</b></p>	<p>As you will know doubt realise, the 2007 South West Dairy event was postponed due to last years nightmare foot and mouth debacle. The event is now being held on 30th January. The MGA will be there on Stand 173 in the Showering Pavilion. Farmers will at this time of year be deciding on their maize varieties for 2008. Please visit our stand and discuss your maize choices for this year. After so many national and local shows last year being cancelled it will be an ideal time to catch up with all things farming. We look forward to seeing you on 30th January.</p>

**MGA HAS ROLE TO PLAY SAY ORGANISERS OF BIOGAS SEMINAR**

SLR, who are the prime movers behind a seminar attempting to tackle the key questions farmers have in relation to this new technology.

The Seminar, to be held on March 12<sup>th</sup> at the The Bristol School of Veterinary Science, University of Bristol, Langford House, Langford, North Somerset, BS40 5DU is to be chaired by MGA vice Chairman John Jackson and is aimed at farmers interested in on-farm biogas production. Areas to be covered include

- The economics of biogas production under UK conditions
- The science and technology of anaerobic digestion (AD)
- AD from a waste perspective
- Renewable power and the ROC's system
- On farm use of bi products
- Planning and licensing
- Finance

Members interested in booking one of what will be limited number of places, will find an invitation enclosed in this mailing. Fill in the slip at the bottom of the invite and send back to SLR Consulting Ltd.

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**TOWN BARTON'S MAIZE**

Following on from last months piece in the MGA Times regarding the maize quality at Town Barton (MGA office farm), a further sample has been taken from the crop harvested and clamped separately three weeks later. The results, summarised below, did surprise us, as all the maize was drilled on the same day and the mix of varieties was consistent across the whole acreage.

We were anticipating much drier material with a higher pH, but as you can see, there is no significant difference between the two. The only major difference is the increase in Starch %, which will be of great value when we start to calve in late summer and begin to buffer feed at grass. The Dry matter difference can probably be put down to the earlier harvested material being cut at the end of a long dry spell. Although the whole plant was not too wet, the cobs had not matured enough (shown by the low starch levels). The later harvested maize had taken up a significant amount of moisture from the rainfall received in the three-week period, but the cobs were more mature.

These results appear to be consistent with other

	Early harvest (29/9/07)	Later harvest (18/10/07)
Dry Matter (%)	27.5	27.7
M.E. (MJ/kg)	11.6	11.7
Starch (%)	21.7	29.3
Crude Protein (%)	8.1	8.3
Ammonia N	5.8	6.1
pH	3.7	3.7

growers in so much as many analysis are showing wetter, more acidic silage than we would normally anticipate. The lessons to be learnt from last year's harvest are probably patience and focusing on whole plant Dry Matter and not just cob maturity.

## MGA 1988—2008

**As the MGA celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> year, a selection of our founder members have been given the opportunity to set out their views on the history surrounding the crop that many members have come to rely on, and the association which formed out of their original interest. First off are the thoughts of someone who many would consider to be the key individual at the outset, Gordon Newman.**

“As a keen exponent of maize in the early 1970’s I had the disadvantage of being regarded as something of a maverick by the, then ICI dominated, British Grassland Society. It took the great drought of 1976 to illustrate to farmers the great potential of wholecrop cereals, maize and lucerne silages, all of which easily outyielded grass in a dry season. With the advantage of having seen the nutritional benefits to high yielding dairy cows of corn and alfalfa silage in Illinois, the Po valley where ensiled wholecrop cereals and ground ear maize (pastone) and Germany (kornkobmix) were highly regarded, I had grown 80 acres of maize (a further 20 had failed to germinate) and 400 acres of lucerne at Compton, where we had a large number of cattle to feed. An overwhelmingly popular farm open day renewed interest in these crops.



I unsuccessfully urged the purist BGS to take other monocotyledonous crops, including maize, under their wing, so then decided to approach other growers, with the scientific backing of Drs David Beever at GRI and Richard Phipps at NIRD as well as Prof Graham Milbourne at NIAB, to form an unofficial group, which we decided to call the Maize Development Association. I remember that we also had nutritional support from my late friend, Geoff Alderman, then investigating the concept of ME. After a few informal meetings, which seemed to grow inexorably in size, and a further ‘brush off’ from the BGS, we decided that it was time to form a more official body, with a secretarial staff and Board.

I decided, as maize then seemed to be concentrated along the M5 corridor, that Somerset CCC in Taunton would make a good venue for the initial meeting. John Parker, the prominent Hampshire farmer, who then grew maize at 500ft on clay cap over chalk, (a most unlikely site) by using his technique of following a large one way plough with a cultivator/drill combination, agreed to chair the meeting. I persuaded Mole Valley Farmers, then a very competitive farmers’ buying group in Devon, to sponsor the costs of the meeting, speaker’s expenses, which none took, and refreshments. As far as I can remember, Richard Phipps, Alan Adamson, ADAS nutrition chemist, a representative from NIAB and myself spoke, as well as a couple of growers. An election of officers followed, with large experienced growers, Norman Light as treasurer and Mary Quicke as farmer chairman.

From then on, the organisation never looked back. We had a few ‘ups and downs’, venues and secretariats changed, but the nutritional merits of the crop, probably backed by gradual climatic warming and the enormous contribution of European breeders, ensured a steady growth in acreage, in spite of no financial help with acreage payments. We also formed a wholecrop cereal group, led by the late Colin Wright. Our non-commercial research, which always had a practical value and conducted on a scientific basis by MGA, ensured an ethical merit to published results. This resulted in the high regard in which MGA is held by farmers and commerce alike to this day. Long may it continue!”

## MGA BIOGAS TRIP 2007

Cautious but ongoing development of biogas production in Germany was the key message picked up by the 30 MGA members who visited Munich last December on what was the first MGA study tour for 4 years.

The tour focused in and around Freising, nr Munich and centred on biogas production from maize along with slurry and other waste products, although we did take time out to visit the Munich University Experimental dairy farm to talk dairy and youngstock research.

The trip, largely organised by the German equivalent of the MGA (Deutsches Maiskomitee), enabled members to learn about the biogas process as well as visit various on-farm digesters to discuss the pro & cons with manufacturers and farmers.

As the trip developed it became clear that the increase in value and subsequent shortages of wheat and maize, has reduced the economic potential of crop fed biogas production and that a more positive view was being taken to mixed feedstock systems based on combinations of slurry, crop and other waste feedstock.

Members heard that economic pressures had encouraged producers to make the best use of the heat produced from the process and saw plants where hot water was being supplied to local houses and retirement homes, as well as being used to dry wood.

Most impressive perhaps, was the visit to the Aufwind Schmack Betriebs plant in Pleining, where two digesters are fed with upwards of 40000 tonnes of silage per year to produce gas that, rather than being burnt, is pumped in to the national gas mains.

Members keen to see and learn more about the trip are encouraged to attend the conference in February at which John Jackson, MGA vice chairman and keen biogas enthusiast, will review the tour.



## DIABROTICA STATUS REPORT

**Below is a report on the meeting that discussed the status of diabrotica in the UK in 2007 and the future policy for 2008. The meeting was arranged by DEFRA and representatives from the MGA & NFU attended.**

### Findings in England and Wales

2003-2007 survey results based on national survey with more intensive surveillance in buffer zones and very intensive sampling in focus zones:

2003 - 92 insects, 5 farms  
 2004 - 87 insects, 5 farms  
 2005 - 481 insects, 10 farms  
 2006 - 27 insects, 5 farms  
 2007 - 3 insects, 3 farms



Monitoring in 2008 will be as in 2007 despite the budgetary constraints at Defra. Defra are not able to determine the cause of the decline after 2005. Defra will leave/revise its policy for 2008/09 in light of an increase or similar number of pests, none found in 2008 or a change in policy in Brussels.

Jim Howie reported that in the light of the trapping findings in 2007, the status quo would be maintained in UK for 2008. That is except one amendment for maize growers around (one and a half miles from unloading freight aircraft) designated airports would have to rotate maize on an annual basis. Declining numbers in 2007 have encouraged Defra that its programme is having a positive effect, and to believe UK can eradicate the pest in order to lift control measures on those farmers currently affected, over time. Farms near airports will still require control measures under the existing regime, but according to risk. Guy Nettleton revealed that only 3 beetles had been found nationally in 2008, one on each of three farms - one around Heathrow, one around Gatwick and one near Epping Forest. Clearly with this number of findings, it would be extremely difficult to argue that the pest was endemic in the UK. Defra agreed to share further information on economic damage caused by the pest in forage crops. MGA suggested that some maize producers, especially grain maize, might be willing to control adult insects on tall crops if pesticides could be made available through a SOLA from PSD. Defra was asked to look at spraying (needs late spraying authority from PSD) standing maize crops around airports as an alternative to the draconian rotation obligation. It was agreed that although seed treatment was a valuable tool, and could easily be justified for agronomic reasons in the control on other pests, it should not be promoted as panacea for the control of Diabrotica. Both the NFU and MGA as well as DEFRA would continue to advocate rotation as the best way to limit the spread of the pest. NFU agreed to send Defra a copy of COPA-COGECA's letter backed by Germany, France and UK to Michael FLEUH at DG SANCO calling for a reduction in statutory control measures against the pest. Simon Draper reported increased findings in Germany in 2007, which may change the EU balance of power in the impetus about how to deal with Diabrotica.