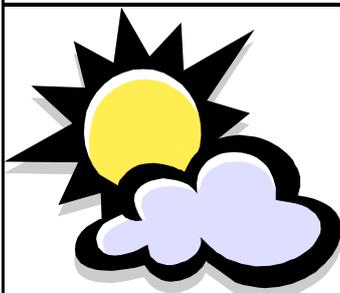


MGA TIMES



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- ◆ Post emergence sprays for maize—Simon Draper.
- ◆ Cereals 2007.
- ◆ Grain maize demonstration site.
- ◆ Top dressing maize.
- ◆ Diabrotica consultation.
- ◆ Maize drilling around the country.



It appears the warm; dry April has had an impact on a large part of the UK and not just the south of England. Met office data for the UK has shown average daily temperatures (taking in to account night and daytime temperatures) for the month of April to be 11.2° C, the warmest since records began. In Devon, the average was 3.2° C above average, leading to a huge area of maize being drilled, probably 10 days – 2 weeks earlier than normal. Given the trend of warmer and drier summers, maize appears to be the crop becoming more and more matched to this climate!



NITROGEN TOP DRESSING



With the dramatic variation in weather being experienced around the country, we thought that it may be worth asking Simon Draper for some last minute agronomy tips to make the most of the climatic challenges. Our key focus was the likely impact of dry and wet weather on Nitrogen top dressing, as weed control etc are covered in the full technical note enclosed within this mailing.

- **Nitrogen on Dry Ground**

For those of you with dry ground, the recommendation is to hold off with Nitrogen until ideally you have had some rain, or at least until rain is forecast imminently. Whatever the weather, the recommendation is to apply bagged nitrogen before the four-leaf stage to avoid the risk of trapping too much fertiliser in the leaf cup which in turn could result in leaf scorch.

If the dry weather continues and spread fertiliser remains on the soil surface, there will inevitably be higher levels of fertiliser ammonia loss, especially where urea has been applied. In some cases it may be necessary to increase the rate of N applied to take account of N lost as ammonia.

Simons' view is that application timing within any particular day is not a key issue, although he does suggest that it may be worth avoiding the early morning dew, which can result in the leaf cups holding water and again if fertiliser is caught, liquid Nitrate!. In dry and hot conditions it will probably pay to apply liquid fertiliser during the cooler evenings to avoid crop scorch.

- **Nitrogen on moist ground**

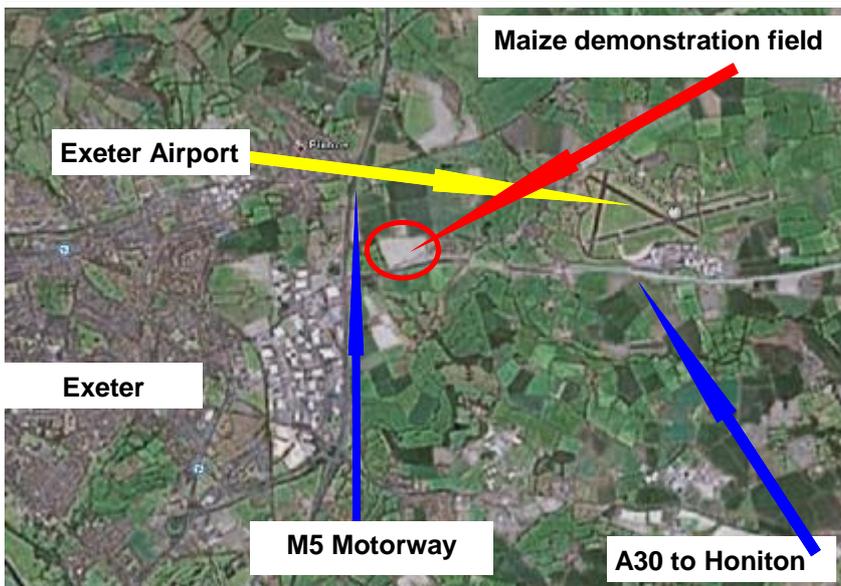
For those of you lucky enough to have had some rain, Nitrogen recommendations, as you would expect, are as normal. There is however an argument that, due to what is likely to have been a period of very high nitrogen mineralisation as a result of warm wet conditions in April, applied nitrogen rates could be cut slightly.

The message is clear, if in doubt give the office a shout. We may well be able to answer your queries and or can pass you on to Simon or Ruth.

DRILLING PROGRESS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Given the incredible weather, drilling progress has been unbelievable with a majority of growers well ahead of normal years.

Hugh McLymont at Crichton Royal (Dumfries) reports that 15 acres sown under plastic on the 14th April is now (2nd May) 4" high. Some planted a week later without plastic is also clearly visible in the rows. Grass is about to be sprayed off with glyphosate before silaging and then drilled. Jeremy Wilson in Kent is well up to date and finding the Eco-drill working well, drilling directly in to the moisture and wishing there were more hours in the day to keep up with the demand from other neighbouring growers. Here at Town Barton in Devon, maize seed was chitting within 3 days of planting and even when sown over 3" deep (to reach the moisture) was poking through within 2 weeks. Weeds are slow to germinate, so decisions on a herbicide strategy are on hold until either rain falls and a flush appears, or the ones that are there get too big and need controlling.



NATURAL ENGLAND DEMONSTRATION SITE 2007



During the last couple of weeks we have been busy establishing the Natural England maize demonstration site. The majority of the area was drilled on the 20th April, with just the late drilling plots to sort out at the end of next week (2nd week of May). The seed went into a fine sandy soil at about 3" deep. A 20 metre run under plastic was also planted on 23rd April. The main objective of this site is to demonstrate best practice for growing maize, particularly that destined for grain.



Measuring the depth of the seed

We have also planted some forage varieties and a biomass variety. A twelve metre wide plot has been drilled with last years seed to examine the germination qualities of older seed. Since planting there has been very little rain, if any at all. Simon and David looked at the site on the 1st May and the maize is showing, with that under plastic catching up with the crops drilled three days earlier.

There will be several meetings through the growing and harvesting season. We are very grateful to David Bright for sourcing seed, Troy Stuart and his team for preparing and drilling the maize, and Mark Pethick who came up from Callington, Cornwall to drill the maize under plastic plot.



MGA TEAM UP WITH CLAAS AT CEREAALS 2007

In an attempt to build on the success of our attendance at last years cereals event, when we signed up the region of half a dozen new members and learnt a huge amount from current UK and overseas growers, we will be at Cereals 2007 this June. At this years event, being held at Vine Farm, Wendy, nr Royston, Cambridgeshire on Wed 13th and Thurs 14th June, we hope to focus on some of the lessons learnt at the MGA Grain maize event last November where the market for grain maize as well as practical grain maize agronomy, drying and utilization was discussed. We will be guests of international machinery manufacturer Claas this year, having a small presence on their main stand (stand number 815). We would invite all members and their guests to visit the stand for a chat and a catch up with all things MGA and grain maize. See you there.

ORGANIC MAIZE GROWING TIPS

The first month of any maize crops growth is by far the most risky and with Organic maize the stakes are even higher. The big threats are bird damage (organic seed is not generally treated with bird deterrent dressings) and weed control. Late, deep drilling in to firm, moist seed beds, followed by regular bird scaring being the best defence against our feathered friends. Weed control for organic crops is best tackled in two stages. Pre and post emergence harrowing, taking out small (up to two leaf) weeds via repeated passes with fine tined harrows, such as the Einbock, which works well until maize has reached the four leaf stage. Inter-row hoeing takes over where the harrow left off. The hoeing works well, taking out weeds and roughing and darkening the soil to improve growth. Weeds in the rows will not be controlled and for this reason sole reliance on inter row hoeing has been cited as a key factor in several mechanical weed controlled crops. Members will be aware that full recommendations for growing maize organically are available via the office and one to one advice is available via Simon and or the office team.

IF IT EVER RAINS

We have seed for **immediate** delivery from our depots in Devon, Hants, Bucks & Deryshire

Your livestock partner

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

For grain/crimping
Ravello

For forage
Picker group 11
Picker + Poncho group 11
Treasure group 8
Hudson group 7
Salgado group 7
Ruler group 6

DIABROTICA CONSULTATION

In early March members may remember receiving from the Plant Health Division of DEFRA, a letter asking for views on the right action to take against the damaging beetle *Diabrotica Virgifera* following its arrival in Britain.

Damage to maize crops is caused by beetle larvae, which feed on crop roots. In 2003 beetles were found around Heathrow and Gatwick airports apparently having “stowed away” on international flights. Up until now the most effective control of spread has been by crop rotation, as the larvae do not travel more than a couple of feet from where the eggs are laid. Use of seed dressings as a control has been tried, but recent evidence suggests they have little effect under UK conditions.

Via the consultation, growers across England are being asked for their views on rotational constraints and the size of any area to which these restrictions would apply. Options include agreeing an infected area in the south east of the UK around which would be a 40 km wide buffer zone or to create one national infected zone, the buffer strip of which would be the English Channel. Adopting the latter option, as yet to be discussed with the European Commission, would enable the UK to reduce the statutory controls within the country.

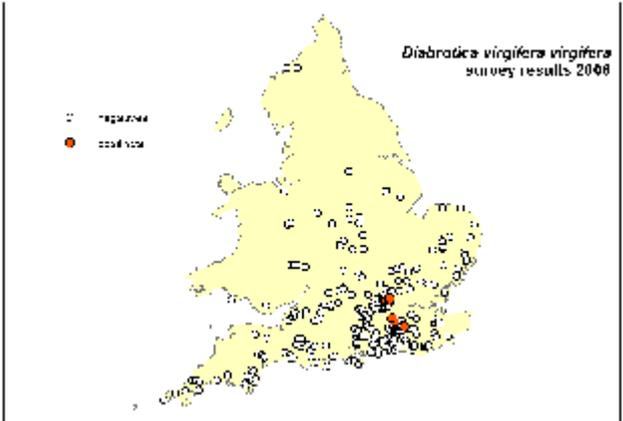
EC measures require the risks of further spread by aircraft to be considered. To be in line with this, DEFRA are proposing to impose a rotational requirement around international airports in maize growing areas.

The consultation asks for your views on the issues identified above. Simon Drapers comments when asked to respond on behalf of the association are set out below.

“The consultation offers three options none of which are particularly acceptable. However, these are all based on *Diabrotica* becoming established to a level where crop damage through lodging becomes serious enough to affect the end yield.

To carry on growing maize in this situation would mean the crop would have to be rotated on an annual basis. Whilst we are not there yet and may never get there, Defra is asking our views on prevention at the outset.

The problem, in my opinion, is prevention is worse than the cure and therefore my view would be to encourage Defra to make the whole country an infected zone, using the channel as the buffer strip to the rest of Europe. This would lead to other problems around existing outbreaks, namely a need for fields within 1.5 miles of international airports (Gatwick, Heathrow & Stanstead) to only have maize grown in alternate years (this appears to be high on Defra’s agenda anyway), but may in the long-term affect fewer growers. This would also mean that, should we get an outbreak sometime in the future, we would have to sort it ourselves.”



Diabrotica larvae



If you wish to respond to this consultation paper it has to be with Defra by 29th June. There is meeting jointly organised by the NFU and MGA which is to be held on the 23rd May at 6.30 pm at a venue to be decided in the South East. The details will be posted on the MGA website when finalised.

Last word:- As you can see from this month’s mailing, the weather is the (literally!) hot topic. Looking out of the MGA office window I can see a bunch of dry cows swishing the flies away with their tails as they would be doing in mid summer. The only difference is I can also see apple blossom in great abundance in the orchard beyond. The weather forecasters keep giving us some hope of rain, then it comes to nothing. This is usually the week we drill the maize but as you can see from the photo below, (taken on 3rd May) the plant is well established and not looking that



horrible sickly yellow that it does most years. A cut of silage has been taken from 38 acres of our normal grazing ground (too much grass for grazing), not a huge amount, but if we do get the rain promised on Monday, we should get a good quality regrowth. Confidence at Town Barton has been boosted by the announcement from Milk Link of an increase in milk price of 0.75p/litre from April. This, coupled with the increase in processing bonus, will make a significant impact on the bottom line of the Dairy business. Future concentrate price rises will obviously make a dent in this, but with our maize/graze policy at Town Barton we should be able to cushion the impact. We look forward to seeing our arable members at the Claas stand at Cereals 2007 in June.