

MGA TIMES



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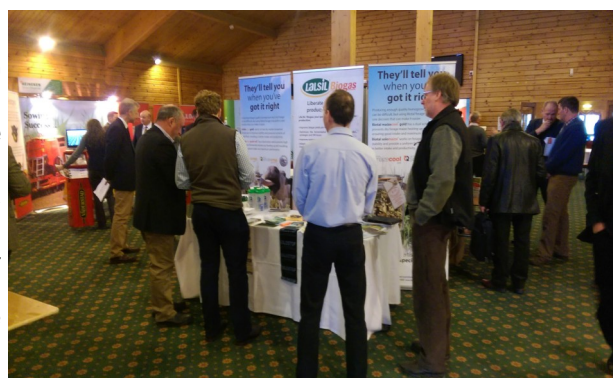


MGA CONFERENCE REVIEW

In This Issue

- ◆ 2016 Conference Papers.
- ◆ Chris Savery summing up maize nutrition & how feeding systems have changed. During his time in the industry.
- ◆ A late maize start - Simon Draper.
- ◆ Nitrogen Predictor form.

Please find enclosed your copy of the 2016 MGA conference proceedings held on the 25th February at the East of England Show Ground in Peterborough. We are grateful to Future Biogas, the conference paper sponsors for their support with the cost of printing. The event saw papers presented by researchers, farmers and crop specialists, with subjects ranging from on farm practicalities to Trace Element Requirements and Soil Management, both in terms of chemical and physical structure. Turnout at 140 was up on the previous year, with many of the seats taken up by active farming members. Our thanks go to the team at the Showground for such a well organised event, BAYER our main conference sponsors and the commercial members who set up and manned trade stands. Electronic copies of the papers are available on the website, some of which contain notes which we were not able to print. We are delighted with the success of the event and the feedback from members was 100% positive. We continue to believe that the conference is a key event in the association's calendar.



DEFRA REPORT—ENERGY MAIZE

We are grateful for the member who made us aware of the recent publication of an important DEFRA funded report focused on energy maize. The report produced by ADAS goes by the exciting title "Impacts of bioenergy maize cultivation on agricultural land rental prices and the environment". Having read the executive summary so far I gather that the authors conclude that the impact of energy maize on land rentals is inconclusive and if anything the impact is very localised. In terms of the environmental impact of energy maize growing the conclusions are mixed. Where maize replaces other arable crops there seems to be little or no impact. Where maize replaces grassland the authors find that the environmental impacts can be more significant. My quick review does however suggest that some of the key assumptions within the report need challenging. High up the list of questionable assumptions is that digestate resulting from AD is not spread to land. I am not sure where digestate goes if not spread to land!. The "no digestate going back to maize" assumption inevitably leads on to the assumed need for large amounts of bagged fertiliser on the crop. Both aspects of the above presumptions are not how I see the use of Digestate on land. Before passing too harsh a judgement I need to read the report in more detail. I would encourage all members to do the same. A copy of the report can be downloaded from the MGA web site.



Impacts of bioenergy maize cultivation on agricultural land rental prices and the environment

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PAPERLESS?

At the last MGA Council meeting the annual budget was discussed and trying to find ways of cutting costs, with this in mind the printing & posting of mailings was bought up. With postage prices always increasing and new technology taking over the world, there has been some suggestions of emailing newsletters to members.

We realise that not everyone is keen on computer technology, but we have had a few requests to have information sent via email. Of the 600 or so members, I have email addresses for approximately 370.

If you would like information sent via the internet, could you please let me know. If you email me your request I will then have a copy of your correct address.

For those not wanting to make the change please do not fear, the yellow envelope will continue to come through the post.

GOOD LUCK GUY

In such challenging times for agriculture, it continues to please both the MGA Council of Management and the office team when new members join the association. New members in the last couple of years have tended to be associated with the AD industry, although we continue to welcome new livestock farming members from time to time. New members that have joined since the last mailing include 12 growers and FutureBiogas as a commercial member. Welcome to you all. New members are great to welcome, however we also have, now and again, to say goodbye to members. A particular case recently was notification from Guy Trehane, that due to a change in farming policy (the cows have been sold) he will not be renewing his subscription later in the year. Why make a mention of Guy's resignation you may ask, well Guy was one of the original gang who set up the MGA nearly 30 years ago. Guy took his turn as MGA chairman, giving up significant volumes of his own time to ensure the MGA got off to a good start. The current MGA council and existing members owe Guy and his colleagues back in the early committees a debt of gratitude and on behalf of the membership I would like to thank Guy for his input over time. I hope to convince Guy to keep in contact with the MGA via electronic copies of the mailings in future. I also hope he continues to call in at show stands etc to offer his constructive comments on how the organisation is doing.

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MGA TRIALS

The gathering of the MGA council and advisors at the conference provides an ideal opportunity to review the R & D plans for the coming year and this year was no exception. Building on the 2015 research programme, the largest for many years, proposals for 2016 were discussed at length with the final R & D proposals put to trials contractors during early March to gain a financial cost to our plans. Table 1 sets out the plans for the year.

Table 1. MGA Small Plot Research and Development Trial Proposals 2016

Pre emergence weed control options	The impact of soil structure on maize yields (Subsoiling/Cultivation/Wheelings)
Post emergence weed control options	The impact of different seedrate and row widths on maize performance
Sequential week control options	The impact of different Nitrogen Rates on maize production
Weed control under plastic film options	Undersowing techniques
Fungicide options to manage/control maize eye-spot and other folia diseases	Cover crop destruction and the impact on following maize production.

Plans are also in place to run trials looking at later harvest dates for biogas varieties, as well as starter fertiliser, slow release nitrogen requirements.

The MGA will continue to work with the British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) in terms of independent conventional variety evaluation. We will continue to review the results via mailings. Full reports are available for most trials via the office for those interested.

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OFFICE NEWS

Members may well have noted a slightly below par service since Christmas, with different voices on the phone and a missing face at the conference. I talk of course of the absence of Jean Howard who has done such an admirable job of running the MGA office since August 2004. Members will be pleased to know that Jean is very much on the mend after successful back surgery and service/voice will be returning to normal just as soon as Jean feels fit enough. Thanks for your patience and understanding over the last month or so. Welcome back Jean.