

## MGA TIMES



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## In this Issue

- ◆ Mineral update.
- ◆ Questionnaire.
- ◆ Prospects if the maize fails—Chris Savery.
- ◆ NIRS LINK project findings.
- ◆ European Maize Meeting.
- ◆ Starling Report.
- ◆ Biogas maize visit.

## EUROPEAN MAIZE MEETING 2012

The MGA, are delighted to be hosting the European Maize Committee meeting in Dumfries, Scotland on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September this year. This prestigious group of maize specialists from the key maize growing countries of Europe meet in one of the participating countries each year to discuss the current year's crop, as well as a specialist subject on which technical papers are presented.

The closed meeting will be hosted by Hugh McClymont, the current MGA Chairman at SAC Crichton Royal. Hugh, who as well as acting of master of ceremonies will be taking the group on a tour of the Crichton farm and research facilities.

Such a venture does not come without a significant cost and we are therefore delighted to acknowledge the generous support from our Gold sponsors Syngenta, as well as Bronze sponsors BASF, Bayer, Ecosyl, Five F, and KWS.

This year's specialist subject up for discussion is **Maize Seedbed Preparation** and we hope, as in the past, to pick up useful information which we will circulate to members via a future European Maize Meeting summary. Members keen to know more should contact the office.



## LIVESTOCK 2012 4TH &amp; 5TH SEPTEMBER.

As usual the MGA will be at the Livestock show on **Stand No FF-389**.

For the last several years we have used maize plants as a backdrop to the stand, which are a good talking point, especially if we bring along the tallest plants from the farm. I don't know what we will do this year as we could be the laughing stock, I suppose at least it will attract folk along, even if only to mock us! Actually it is a



serious subject, not just for our farm, but all through Great Britain this year. A lot of thought is going into winter feeding and how to replace the lack of quality and quantity of maize. So this year on the MGA stand we will be holding maize feeding clinics. John Morgan and Chris Savery will be available during the 2 days to give you advice on how best to make use of wet, immature and acidic maize. Chris has written a useful technical note for this mailing.



**ORDER YOUR MGA MINERALS**

The MGA minerals, which continue to be manufactured and distributed on our behalf by Mole Valley Farmers, represent good value for money and continue to be formulated to 100% of the stated specification. It is also worth noting that the basic formulations can be tweaked for individual farmers and that mineral straights such as limestone flour etc can be purchased under the MGA Banner. In this mailing we have included the mineral specifications and the current price list. Please remember that the MGA receive a small commission for any minerals sold and that this money goes to subsidise further MGA Research and Development.

**To order MGA minerals, please ring Mole Valley Feed Solutions on 01278 420481.**

**AD PLANT VISIT**

One of the benefits of being in the MGA office is talking to members and being able to invite yourself and friends to their farms. On a trip to Suffolk and Norfolk last month, I went to have a look around George Gittus's new AD plant. Mark Wells, George's farm director gave us a fascinating tour of the plant, as he explained, the AD plant is 1.4MW, fed purely on maize silage at approx. 72 tonnes per day. It produces electricity to the national grid, as well as being used to supply the indoor pig unit, and the business park.

It went live in January 2012 and is working well, with plans to capture the heat and use for crop drying and conditioning.

They are growing 1440 acres of maize on the home farm and on 10 other farms in the area, using maize as a good break crop on heavy black grass infested land.

The digestate is returned back onto the land in rotation with other arable crops.

It was a very impressive AD plant and Mark explained the whole process very well. If members are thinking about AD, we have some very good contacts within the MGA membership, who are willing to answer questions.



**ESTIMATION OF RUMINANT ENERGY AND DEGRADABILITY VALUES OF MAIZE SILAGE USING NEAR INFRARED REFLECTANCE SPECTROSCOPY**

The LINK project tasked with generating accurate Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy (NIR) equations for maize silage is now finished, the results will soon be available via the final report from the Forage Analytical Assurance (FAA) group. Please contact the MGA Office to check the availability of the report.

As reported by project manager Jonathan Blake so entertainingly at February's MGA conference, the work had three objectives. The first two aims were to develop NIR numbers for maize silage quality which would allow rapid and accurate NIR analysis of maize in the future. The third objective focused on potential of a novel gas production technique to improve maize silage analysis further.

Over the two years of the project, two distinct areas of interest have developed for the MGA. First off is the science, which has once and for all disproved a well held belief among many maize growers and their advisors that maize silage is maize silage, or in other words analysis of maize silage is unnecessary, as the quality varies so little. In fact the "maize is maize" assumption could not be further from the truth, with results for the 90 maize samples tested being well spread. The ME of the tested silages ranged from 9.1 to 12 ME for example.

The second area of interest from the work was the practical on farm observations made by Jean, as she travelled the country picking up samples.

Key observations from the collecting of samples were:

- Effectiveness of the clamp film in preserving silage quality
- Potential manage earth walled clamps well and not so well
- The considerable variation in chop length and logic for varying chop length
- The potential to use buckets to reduce the surface area of clamps
- The importance of having sharp shear grab blades
- The potential clamp damage resulting from starlings
- The huge number of varieties used and lack of real on farm analysis as to the differences between them.
- How friendly and positive MGA members were to the project

More details plus photos of the majority of clamps visited are available via the MGA Office. Thanks again for all those that offered silage for the work.

**DRILL**  
**Westerwolds**  
**Italian Ryegrass**  
**Forage Rape**  
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**NOW**  
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**PERSISTENCE PAYS IN STARLING CONTROL**

While the recently published Dairy Co report in to starling Infestations on the Somerset Levels and their Impact on dairy farming disappointingly comes up with nothing that was not discussed at the MGA meeting held in Pilton last autumn and indeed other meetings over the years, it does independently log the issues and puts some financial costs on the impact of what many farmers would consider to be at best a winter pest!. The report will raise the profile of the problem, be that a good or bad thing. From a positive perspective, anything that brings this very real problem to the attention of those with the resources to tackle it is a good thing. The downside may be that any study focusing largely on the problem rather than the solutions, creates the risk that only negative publicity can come from the exercise



The report released this week is being promoted under the banner “Persistence pays in starling control” and reminds farmers that adopting several control methods at once and before on farm starling numbers get out of hand, is likely to be most effective.

The review conducted by Kingshay studied the problem on 11 Somerset farms, where various techniques were reviewed. Co author of the work Duncan Forbes notes that “the more control measures in place, combined with greater diligence in their use, led to lower starling numbers recorded”

While accepting the impracticality on every farm, netting of silage clamps and entirely proofing cattle buildings was also viewed as effective. Altering feeding regime to include after dusk feeding also appears to have potential.

The full report, available by following the link at the bottom of this note provides a good review of the current problem, but sadly, no doubt due to the terms of reference, does not in our opinion tackle the potential solutions head on. The MGA will be pushing Dairy Co to follow up this work with the studies identified by the Kingshay team, so that solutions rather than problems can be the focus of further work in this area.

For instance, we would like practical work done on the use of in feed deterrents, as well as the most likely long term solution, that being bird proofing units.



The full report is available by following the link below. You can also access the report by following the link on the MGA website.

<http://www.dairyco.org.uk/research-development/completed-projects/alternative-methods-of-starling-control/>

**2012 MGA QUESTIONNAIRE**



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In this months mailing we have included a questionnaire that we would like you to fill in when you have a spare few minutes. The last questionnaire the MGA produced was in 2005 and the committee felt it would be useful to update our records. We know that the organisation covers some of the largest growers and we feel it would be beneficial to sell the value of the MGA to commercial companies by quoting the results of the survey, including the amount of maize grown by MGA members and what the crop is grown for.

If you don't do anything else, your up to date email address will be very helpful. As some of you will know, we are sending email updates as and when there is something that needs talking about (the members without email do get the note through the post). The MGA has 610 members and we have 307 email addresses, although I do get about 25 coming back as incorrect.