

MGA TIMES



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**Mole Valley
Farmers**

MGA CONFERENCE—23RD FEBRUARY 2017

Having introduced you to two of the MGA conference speakers last month, apart from the MGA trial reports lead by Neil Groom & Oliver Knowland we have asked Tim Stephens from Wessex Water to talk about the work that Wessex Water are doing with farmers in the Dorset area of the country.

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- ◆ MGA 2017 Variety booklet.
- ◆ Conference invite.
- ◆ Nutrition event report—Mike Wilkinson.
- ◆ Nitrogen predictor input form.
- ◆ European Maize meeting report.

Tim's job as a Catchment Adviser for Wessex Water is to improve drinking water quality by working closely with the farmers who surround boreholes and reservoirs. Tim and his colleagues at Wessex Water have been carrying out cover crop field trials for the past three winters. He will present the findings from these trials and share first hand examples of how maize growers in the Wessex region are adopting cover



crops to reduce water pollution and improve soil health. The later harvest date of maize can make establishing an effective cover crop challenging, even in the south of England. Tim will explore when growing a cover crop is appropriate, and when it may not be the best option.

Tim was brought up on his family's beef and sheep farm in Devon, studied agriculture at Edinburgh University, and now lives in Dorset. Before joining Wessex Water he worked in the fresh produce industry and in agricultural education. Outside of work he plays rugby and keeps a small flock of sheep. Tim is an active member and Treasurer of Dorset Grassland Society. He has recently been awarded a Nuffield Scholarship looking at how farmers and water companies can work together to ensure clean water. Travel plans include trips to North and South America, Australia/NZ and Europe. Tim will look in particular detail at ways that livestock and arable farming can intensify in a sustainable manner. He says *'I believe that farmers and water companies can both gain from working together to improve water quality, as well as achieving wider benefits for the public and for our natural environment'*.



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MAKE USING THE MGA N PREDICTOR YOUR FIRST NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION FOR 2017

Having committed both time and money to the cultivation, establishment and weed control of your maize crops it seems crazy not to put similar time and effort into getting the all important Nitrogen fertiliser rate as accurate as possible. The process starts with an assessment of the crops inorganic fertiliser requirement to reach optimum yield.

The contribution of the soil and any organic manure applied are then taken into account as is the rain fall and previous cropping. To make what can appear to be a rather complicated exercise more practical Simon and John have developed, and updated as time goes on, the MGA Nitrogen Predictor, an input form for which is included in this mailing. Please fill in the form and return it to the office. Following input into the MGA computer a field specific nitrogen recommendation will be returned to you.

The Nitrogen Predictor continues to be used by a loyal band of members which is great. That said we would love to expand it use to a larger group and would urge non users to take a look during 2017. One of the existing users is Stephen Temple, current MGA Chairman who says:

"We have been using the N predictor since joining the MGA, and as long as we supply accurate information, the results we get have been very good. Sometimes we are surprised by how low the nitrogen requirement is, but the crop performs just as well as where the indicated requirement is much greater".



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION NUMBER 2 - DRILL EARLY FOR AN EARLY HARVEST!

Research would suggest that drilling maize, as soon as soil conditions are suitable, and when soil temperatures hit 8-10 degrees (after April 15th) will result in an earlier harvest in an average year. While slow to get going (a bit like me in the morning!) early drilled maize will make progress, in terms of establishing its roots and accumulating heat units, all of which means that the crop can make best use of the warming sun during May and the longest days in June.

While soil temperature should not be the only factor to consider when giving the drill man the go ahead, it has a part to play. For this reason the MGA will be once again establishing a net work of soil thermometers around the country, the data from which will be made available to members via the MGA web site, twitter and facebook pages. Volunteers required – To make this happen we need volunteers to monitor their soil temperatures.

Perhaps you check soil temperatures anyway and could simply update the MGA with numbers already collected, or alternatively you may fancy getting involved for the first time. Please contact Jean in the office for all the information on what is required.

Last word:

Looking back at 2016 I think most of us will have been pleased with the maize crop this year. After a cold spring the crop took off and never looked back and certainly harvesting for most was trouble free. It was pleasing to see a lot less stubble fields bare, with at least a pass through with a cultivator.

Unfortunately MGA grower membership has dipped quite a bit this year, the milk price and retirement counting for most of the resignations. It is encouraging though to already be having bookings for the conference coming in and our commercial members have supported our meetings and trips through the year.

It is pleasing to welcome industry new comers QLF Agronomy to MGA activity with their advert in the times and involvement with the MGA/Future Biogas trials at Gayton, Norfolk. We look forward to hearing of the results of the Gayton trial and other work undertaken at Harper Adams University at the MGA conference in February where QLF will have a trade stand. To learn more about QLF Agronomy's activity visit their web site www.qlfagronomy.co.uk.

Finally we would like to wish all MGA members a Happy Christmas and more importantly, a Prosperous and healthy 2017.

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