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Mole Valley
Farmers

THE NEW MGA CHAIRMAN

Time again to introduce our new chairman Stephen Temple, who farms with his wife at Wighton in Norfolk and took the chair of the MGA at the June AGM following the time based resignation of past Chairman Michael Christensen from Somerset.

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- ◆ The US system of assessing milk/tonne of maize silage—Mike Wilkinson.
- ◆ Maize update from around the country.

I write having taken up the chair of the Maize Growers Association at our recent AGM held at Cambridge. I take on the role from Michael Christensen and would like to take this early opportunity to thank Michael for his leadership over the preceding two years.

I farm at Copys Green farm in Norfolk being the 4th generation of the family to do so. At the 230 ha holding we run numerous activities with the main enterprise being the 100+ dairy cow enterprise, half of the milk going into the cheese we make. In addition to the cows we grow arable crops for feed and seed, produce award winning cheese and run a farm focused Anaerobic Digester producing electricity and heat via a

Combined Heat and Power unit plus farm based contracting and farm electronics enterprises .

The “almost” pure bred Brown Swiss dairy herd produce in the region of 8000litres a head based on a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) ration of maize and grass silage in the winter and grazed grass during the summer months topped up with concentrates in the milking parlour.

My interest in maize focuses around the crops potential to make good use of the land we farm, tied in with its excellent feed qualities for both the livestock and digester. I am particularly interested in maize establishment and in a bid to reduce energy use and improve soil condition have moved to a strip tillage establishment system, currently using a Monosem drill to establish maize crops.



Stephen with a friend and AD plant in background

Looking forward to my role as MGA chairman I am determined to continue the good work done by the Association focused on both recognising the inherent benefits maize has to farmers and the wider environment, while recognising and providing advice to mitigate the impacts of inappropriate maize growing.

I would urge all growers to recognise the above balancing act and do their bit to ensure that the genuine benefits do not get overshadowed by the potential negatives.

Finally, having recently returned from the MGA Agronomy Study tour to France, I would urge members to make the most of your MGA membership. I would love to see you at the 2017 conference in February and also remind you of the Agronomy and Ruminant consultants available “free of charge” over the phone as well as the Nitrogen Predictor service. Please also speak to John and Jean in the office who will do what they can to answer your questions. Kind regards and good harvesting.

Stephen Temple
MGA Chairman.

MAIZE UPDATE AROUND THE COUNTRY

With the unpredictable weather yet again influencing the progress of the maize crop, some members of the MGA Council have given an update of the state of play with their own crops. Neil Groom, who travels the country looking at maize crops and trials, at the end of this report sums up the situation very well.

Stephen Temple—North Norfolk. “We are running about 3 weeks later than normal with drilling. Our first drilled, Emmerson, which went in on 3 May, is now over 6' and tassels are just starting to emerge. Ambition drilled 9 May is now about 5', and Glory drilled 14 May is about 4' high. All looking well after the recent warmth. With temperatures reaching 27° on Saturday and Sunday, and at 32° today (18th July), I hope that has put the eyespot risk behind us. Forgot to mention that around here contractors are flat out with wholecrop rye. We are going to do a small field for a neighbour tomorrow, as his contractor cannot get there for another 10 days.”

John Jackson—Severn Trent Water, Notts. “Maize went in on time-- from the second week in April to early May. All was looking excellent with good germination and early growth, pre-emergence herbicide working well and little sign of any stress.---then June came and gave us 8 inches of rain!-- and certain areas look very different now. Well drained areas with good structure have recovered well but poorly structured areas like headlands and field corners look yellow and will mean this years crop will be average at best.”

Joe Foot—Dorchester, Dorset. “Our maize was drilled two weeks later than usual so we didn't finish until the 12th of May. The maize under film has looked fantastic all the way through. Conventional maize looks average, although this hot weather is fantastic for it. I reckon every 3 days of this weather buys us back one day from the late drilling! It's the first time I have watched the Tour de France and not been jealous of the French Maize crops, which look poor! I think if this weather stays for a bit ,we are on course for at least average yields and quality and maybe 7 – 10 days later harvest than average (hopefully this will be brought forward).

Graeme Cock—Ashburton, Devon. “Our drilling this year was the latest for 7 years- a very frustrating slow spring. First drilled and best looking crops were planted on 27th April. Now looking pretty respectable, being 8ft tall and just starting to tassel. Rest is playing catch up, still looking respectable and full of potential with this stunning weather. (it is too hot for humans though). Will undoubtedly be a later harvest ,but if this heat continues it will move the clock on. Too early to say what full crops will perform like.”

Richard Martin—Bodmin, Cornwall. “Our maize drilling was finished by the 15th May, having started on the 4th. All crops are looking a healthy, dark green which I like to see. The best is about 6 ft and there are a couple fields with issues, I think this is down to soil structure from previous potato crops, which were harvested in some very poor conditions, I think soil structure is becoming more of an issue than it has been before.”

John Whitby—Wexham, Buckinghamshire. “We planted a trial under plastic on 4th April with Samco which is now over 7ft in places. However maize in the open was drilled 10 days later than normal for our location i.e. 25th April onwards. All maize looks well with some over six feet tall. Despite a very dull June the regular rainfall (including over 100mm for June) the maize kept going. At this stage we are on target for harvest on time and yield potential looks excellent. Rye for Biogas also just harvested”.

Neil Groom—Eye, Suffolk. From a national point of view there has been an East / West split in the weather this spring with the West having good weather at the end of May and early June allowing maize to grow away really well in the spring and we now have many crops approaching tasselling and a lot of growth. Recent hot weather will help reduce the threat of eyespot on these crops. Where fields may be low in nutrient status there is still opportunity to use a non scorching foliar nitrogen product, which can be tank mixed with fungicides for fields which are continuous maize and have had eyespot historically.

In the East we have suffered from horrible cold easterly winds throughout May and June reducing soil and air temperatures. High rainfall has also prevented some growers applying post em herbicides at optimum timings because the fields were too wet to travel. Recent hot weather has improved growth, but tassels are working their way up the plant and many crops will not be massively bulky. Yields of starch could still be good since 60-65% of the total yield is from the cob. The high rainfall may have leached more nutrients than normal, so a foliar feed could be good and help increase cob and starch yields. These products stick to the leaf and get absorbed through the leaf and are used for grain fill. We have sprayed in 30°C temperatures and had no scorch. Growers using plastic have superb crops this year. Field conditions in early April were too wet for early planting and most crops were drilled from April 20th onwards. The weather when the crops emerged through the film was good and the plants quickly greened up and rapidly grew. Most crops have a lot of nutrients under them and the warmer soils under the film allows faster access to the nutrients.



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NEW MGA RUMINANT CONSULTANT

The MGA are delighted to announce that Mike Wilkinson has taken up the mantle of MGA Ruminant Consultant following the retirement of Chris Savery last month. Members will hear more from Mike over the coming year as he is set to write several technical notes for the mailings and web site. As in the past with Chris members are welcome to put their nutrition queries to Mike via the MGA office email.



Mike Wilkinson

Mike is a graduate from Leeds and Newcastle universities following his formal studies with 10 years at Hurley before moving via MAFF to private research and consultancy work. Mike returned to formal research at Reading, London, De Montfort, Leeds and Cambridge and now works part time as an Honorary Professor at Nottingham University and consultant to the livestock industry.

Mike will be joined in writing ruminant technical notes by Dr Chris Bartram, Head of Nutrition at Mole Valley feed solutions more of whom in the next MGA Times. Suffice to say we are delighted to have both on board.

EMAIL UPDATES???

In this mailing we have included an eyespot update that Simon Draper wrote a couple of weeks ago and was sent to members as an email. If you did not receive the update, please email me on info@maizegrowersassociation.co.uk and I will put your name on the email list.

At the moment we have 384 members on the list and I am very keen to get as many onto the system as possible. I have put everyone into regions, so if there is a particular story for a certain part of the country I can email them and not pester the rest of the membership with needless emails.



UK DAIRY DAY



Wednesday 14th September at Telford—We hope to see you there.

BASIS & NROSO POINTS

This year we have been allocated 3 BASIS points & 2 NROSO points for annual membership of the Maize Growers Association. If you would like the reference numbers, please give me a ring in the MGA Office on 01363 775040.



“Healthy Silage”—13th September, Cornwall.

Speaking of Mike Wilkinson, you will be able to hear him talk about Mycotoxins at a meeting at the Duchy College, Stoke Climsland, Cornwall on Tuesday 13th September. There will be talks on the risks of mycotoxins, reducing maize silage contamination and reducing mycotoxins in livestock. There will also be a walk around the Duchy College Farm. If you would like more details, please give Jean a ring in the MGA Office.

MGA GETS THE MESSAGE ACROSS - FARMERS WEEKLY 22nd JULY

The MGA had star billing in the Farmers Weekly letters column last week. In reply to a letter in the previous weeks magazine titled “Management of maize is problem”, we wrote a letter from the office and also our Chairman replied and both were highlighted in the letters page.

We feel it is important to get the benefits of growing maize message out to, not only MGA members (who already know) but to those in the industry who can't stop damning this great crop.

Maize can be a great crop if grown correctly

* I write in response to Ross Cherrington's letter (Opinion, 15 July). Like Ross, I agree it is not maize per se that is the issue, but inappropriately grown maize. As with any late-harvested crop – including potatoes, weeds and sugar/fodder/energy beet – grown on unsuitable land, harvest machinery can lead to soil compaction which, if left unmanaged, can cause soil wash and erosion following rain. I do not agree that maize is a dumping ground for manures and slurry. Maize, being relatively late drilled compared with other spring crops and having a relatively high requirement for phosphate and potash, in fact provides an ideal opportunity to use the nutrients contained within manure. In order to improve awareness of the potential late-harvest soil issues, the Maize Growers Association (MGA) has for many years undertaken research, organised trips and held/been involved with many on-farm knowledge transfer events. Access to all environment-

focused MGA activities is free to growers, be they MGA subscription payers or not, showing how seriously the MGA takes its responsibilities. A key weapon in the armoury of growers keen to manage the effects of their cropping choice on the water environment is the snappily titled “MGA Site and Maturity Group Selector”. This site-specific tool provides farmers with a maize maturity group recommendation, or if the field is unsuitable for maize, it recommends they consider alternatives. In addition to the selector tool, we continue to review and inform members about the numerous nutrients- and soil-retention techniques available to them, including nutrient planning (to include the effective use of slurries and farmyard manure), as well as undersowing and after-sowing. All of the above initiatives are designed to enable as many farmers as possible to benefit from the animal performance and environmental positives associated with such a globally productive crop, while at the same time manag-



ing their land in an appropriate manner. **John Morgan** Head of the MGA's office team
Field selection key to success
* The recent correspondence on maize growing saddens me. I am a member of the MGA

and we regularly exhort our members to follow best practice and work with other organisations such as Catchment Sensitive Farming to get the message across. Our recommended varieties booklet explicitly warns against the growing of maize on inappropriate sites. Of course, there will always be rogue farmers who think they can get away with bad practice,

Following best practice will ensure soil is protected
but the cross-compliance rules and the nitrate-vulnerable zone regulations can be used to set an example to deter such bad practice. Not only is bad practice against regulation, it also risks farming's greatest asset, the soil. **Stephen Temple** Wighton, Norfolk