

MGA TIMES

Maize Growers Association

June 2020

In this issue: Manure article - Maize at Different Stages - N Predictor 2020 Review - Forage Cost Comparison Table - Using Manner

Date for your diary: 7th July 2020 - Annual General Meeting, 10am on Zoom.
Everyone welcome, email the office for the link.

Status of Maize Crops in the UK

At our MGA council meeting last week (11th June), we asked council members to tell us a bit about their 2020 maize crop; here is what they had to say.

Jon Myhill: Norfolk - Crops drilled 8th/10th of April into moisture looking really well (1m high). **Lincolnshire** - not doing as well. Limited moisture with crops ranging from emergence to 8 true leaves resulting in a re-think of the harvest programme. Confidence returning after recent rain.

Simon Draper – Large variation in growth around country, depending on rainfall. Leatherjacket and wireworms, especially adjacent to grass fields, have been a problem. No treatments available but where problem was picked up early and crops re-drilled in places, there is now a double crop as patches of leatherjacket-damaged areas are redeeming themselves.

Stephen Temple: Norfolk - Drilled mid-April into cover crops (MGA cover crop trial site on his farm is doing well!). Maize after grass silage has needed irrigation. Had some rain (30mm) but concerned that moisture lost via evapotranspiration. The farms plough has been replaced by deep tine pre rotovator. Cover crop 'stalky' trash has caused some problems due to build up of surface trash in machinery.

Mike Christensen: Somerset – Timely cultivation has been key. To avoid dry clayey soils cracking and turning into 'gravel' we have been cultivating directly in front of new Tempo drill which has been a success getting well placed seed on the moisture. Where soils have dried out maize has been slow to germinate. Feeling confident of an OK maize crop due to recent rainfall.

John Jackson (MGA Chair): Nottingham – Timing of soil cultivation and consequently soil moisture retention has been difference between successful crop and those just germinating around country. Used Tempo drill and believes there was a saving in the amount of seed used as it was drilled so evenly.

Graeme Cock: South Devon – Exceptional maize crop, one of his best. Drilled first area under plastic which has done well, with the bulk of crop around 1m tall. Has recently had 50-60mm of valuable rain.

Neil Groom – Improving after recent rainfall. The much needed recent rain will ensure that the majority of crops should do well. Neil's recent visit to the MGA trial site confirms that while initially suffering due to lack of moisture the site is now looking good.

John Whitby: Slough – Maize crops performing well being drilled into well-manured ground which contributed to slightly higher moisture at drilling. Potentially compacted areas not performing as well. Very short of moisture early on.

Richard Martin: Cornwall - Maize struggling due to dry weather. Optimistic that rain will have improved things. In years like this placement of seed seems to be really important. Some maize knee-high in sheltered spots, but in the same field if exposed its 4-5 inches.

The key take-home message from the review appears to be that drilling (early, even and consistent depth) plus available moisture are very important. There is little we can do to encourage the rain however we can drill maize in the ground well and in good time for whatever the season brings.

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MGA Consultants - A nice surprise this morning with the resigning of a lapsed member who has found that herbicide advice from Simon has been more than worth the membership fee. He has encouraged us to remind others that our consultants - Simon Draper (Independent agronomist) and Mike Wilkinson (Ruminant consultant/nutritionist) are available via phone and/or email for no extra charge as part of your membership fee. He and we encourage you to make the most of them by contacting Sarah in the office for Simon and Mike's details.

Precision Drilling vs. Standard Cereal Drill

A recent flurry of member enquiries has sent Sarah digging in the archives for the summary of the Drilling Demonstration Site run at the then MGA office site in Devon during 2005. We set out to compare conventional precision drilled maize performance (after ploughing) with direct drilled maize, via a Vaderstad and Cross-Slot drill. In addition we compared the performance of the conventional maize drill following ploughing with Vaderstad drilled maize following ploughing. All treatments were costed out at the time. It is important to stress that the plots in the demonstration site were not randomly replicated. Yield and quality data were collected and compared.

The below table shows the Fresh and dry matter yield returns as well as establishment costs/ha and per tonne.

DRILLING TECHNIQUE	Plough/Power Harrow/ Precision Drill	Plough/Disc/ Vaderstad Drill	Vaderstad Direct Drill	Cross-Slot Direct Drill
YIELD t/ha	53.33	58.54	35.83	41.15
DM%	29.50	24.30	29.40	31.55
DM Yield t/ha	15.73	14.23	10.53	13.16
Establishment Cost £/ha	110	75	50	62
Establishment Cost t/DM	6.99	5.28	4.75	4.7

Observations from the site concluded that:

Fresh weight yield was highest for the conventional drilled plots. Direct drilled crops reached higher DM's at harvest than conventional drilled plots. Establishment costs were highest (£/ha and £/tonne DM) on the conventionally drilled plots.

The demonstration plots reminded us that judging crops on looks alone can be deceiving. The direct drilled crops looked poor compared to the others but their high DM and low establishment costs made them more competitive when costs per tonne of DM were considered.

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