

MGA TIMES

Maize Growers Association

November 2021

Great Gutton Farm
Shobrooke
Credton
Devon
EX17 1DJ
01363 775040
@maizegrowers
Maize Growers Association
info@maizegrowersassociation.co.uk
www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk



European Maize Meeting

In September, the annual meeting of the European Maize Committee was held via video conference. Each year, a collection of maize specialists from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Sweden and the UK come together to update others on the status of the maize crop that year, along with the challenges that are facing maize growers in their country. There is then a presentation from each representative on a specific subject, this year 'Mechanical Weed Control'. Presentations covered: modelling of weather and soil type to estimate how many days are available to hoe most effectively without causing soil damage, combining band spraying of herbicides and interrow hoeing to cut agrochemical use and reduce the risk of herbicide resistance, developing robotic weed control technology, and band-spraying herbicides vs spraying whole field. We have a recording of the event should any of you like to watch it. Also, enclosed in this mailing is an edit of the paper given by Sarah Tucker of the MGA to the committee on the status of the UK maize crop this year. We look forward to Denmark hosting a face-to-face meeting next September! We are very grateful to **Samco** for sponsoring this meeting.



Conference Plans

It is time to start thinking about the 2022 MGA Maize Conference and after this year's success with speakers and record attendees we have opted to use the same format. We will therefore hold an online conference split over two half days on February 22nd and March 8th 2022. We have an excellent line up of potential speakers who will be covering a variety of very current issues and subjects to be aware of going forward. Because we have missed out somewhat on the face to face interaction that the conference previously offered, and will again this coming year due to the proposed format, we are also intending to hold an in-person maize event early next year, more details on this to follow. It would be great to have as many of you listening is as possible, and we will endeavour to record the events again to allow you to watch afterwards.



Cover Crop Photo Competition

We are running our winter cover crop photo competition again and would love to see as many of your entries as possible. See enclosed flyer for more information. Email the office with your entries.



Carbon Challenge – Successfully Up and Running

We are delighted that six farmers have signed up to our Maize Carbon Challenge, supported by Future Biogas, and have been taking soil samples from the fields in question over the last month. We are looking forward to the 'before' soil analysis results. Over time, we will be introducing you to each of the fields and farmers taking part in the challenge and will give you regular updates on what is happening in each field. Keep your eyes peeled for background to our first farming business.

Silage analysis

Don't forget that you are eligible for reduced-cost silage analysis through your MGA membership. Now is a great time to test your silage as it becomes the majority component in the diet of your livestock going forward. Having a reliable, independent silage analysis report will help with ration planning and complimentary feeding. The process is easy and efficient: email or call the MGA office to request a sample and postage bag, we will post them to you first class, you will collect a small sample and use the freepost bag to send it to Sciantec. They will then email the results to us and we will forward to you. A simple maize silage analysis for DM, ME, starch, protein and more will cost around £13.40. Please note that other forages can be tested at a reduced cost too. Contact the office for more information or to request sample and postage bags.

Observations of the analysis received so far this autumn include complications associated with early and late first cut grass silages. Early May cut silages appear to be wetter than ideal and, due to strong fermentation, have very low pH levels. As a consequence of the moisture content and low pH intake predictions are not good. In contrast later (end of May early June) grass silages are dryer, have lower energy and protein levels. Intake of the later silages will be good even if nutrient content is not great.

Maize silage analyses are few so far however early reports suggest high yields of wetter, greener maize with good starch levels. Where possible fresh maize should not be fed to cows pre-Christmas to allow 'maturation' of the silage and moisture equalisation. The maize and bean combinations, planted on various sites around the country, as a result of interest raised at the MGA conference, are analysed as fresh forage. Harvest Dry Matter (DM%) is typically lower (5% less than the accompanying maize) with higher protein levels (11% compared to the more typical 8% expected from maize alone).

Council Harvest Reviews

With silage harvest now all but complete we thought a round up of experiences from around the country may be interesting. Good luck to those looking forward to grain harvest.

John J, Nottingham—Maize yields are average or above average in some cases. Where the land was not too light and maintained enough moisture leading up to harvest, yields were good. Crops on light land ran out of steam due to the lack of moisture. The plants were tall but the cobs were only 75% filled. Maize crops raced through the dry matter stages due to the dry and warm weather over the harvest period and there was a smooth harvest due to dry conditions with fields left in a very good state and clean roads. Overall, good yields but higher than preferred dry matters in some instances.

Stephen, Norfolk—Harvest ran about a fortnight behind our normal timing, yields mostly reasonable rather than good apart from that drilled after first cut grass which was poor. All maize ground is now in either winter barley, winter beans or cover crop. Maize and beans yielded about 10% less than pure maize, but with the cold then wet spring there was very poor bean emergence. *(More on the amalgamated findings from maize and bean trials around the country in our next mailing)*

Jon M, Norfolk—It was a delayed maize harvest in Norfolk. A cool, dull August meant dry matters remained in the mid 20's until the end of September. Yields have been good, with some crops doing over 55t/ha, quality looks down on average with the bulk of the weight coming from the plant this year. Majority of harvests in the area will be finished by early November and little damage has been caused to the soil this year. Winter cereals have followed a lot of the maize, and undersown grass and clovers have provided an overwinter green crop where autumn cereals were not planned.

John W, Berkshire—Excellent yields, very tall, anecdotally yield 15% above average however no samples taken yet for starch. Harvest was a few days later than usual and we had a grant to sow 37kg /ha of a predominantly ryegrass mix post-harvest onto four fields from SE Water. These are emerging well. All other maize fields were drilled to wheat. The main challenge was a later than usual sowing date due to cold weather, and late frost meant that our usual choice of a late variety should/could have been modified to an earlier one to allow an earlier harvest. However rainfall during the year was regular leaving the crop well-watered on our light land. Unusually, we saw no drought stress or rolled leaves whatsoever this year, the crop just kept on growing. Indeed it grew so much that the agronomist saw evident N deficiency as the crop craved far more than usual. Dry down was slow at least until the optimal conditions arrived in mid-September. In summary, it has been an exceptionally high yielding year, although could have been higher with more feeding. Will probably go for an earlier variety next year despite being a very favourable site.



Farming Rules for Water Focus

Impact on Manure and Slurry Storage as Assessed by ADAS, Funded by AHDB

Members may, by now, be aware that the Environment Agency (EA) are contemplating stricter action to enforce the Farming Rules for Water, and in particular Rule 1, focused on nutrient management. An impact assessment, produced by ADAS in June 2021, and funded by AHDB, has explored how the enforcement of Rule 1 could affect pollution of water and air inadvertently ('pollution swapping') with some interesting results.

Rule 1 encourages farmers to plan their nutrient application to match the requirements of the crop and current nutrient status of the field to reduce the risk of over-applying nutrient or doing so when nutrient will not be utilised by the crop and could consequently leach away. Nutrient management planning will be based on guidance contained within Fertiliser Manual, RB209, which states that the majority of crops do not require autumn-applied nitrogen. As a result of, in effect, a closed period for spreading manures, many farms will have to store manure and slurry for an extended period and to spread more manure in the spring. The ADAS impact assessment makes the point that while, as a result of the limited autumn spreading, nitrate leaching will likely be reduced, nutrient loss via soil runoff and ammonia volatilisation in the spring is likely to increase. The impact assessment highlights the sometimes conflicting challenges associated with storing and spreading organic materials, including the increase in in-field manure heaps and requirement for larger slurry stores.

The potential increase in spring 'soil-wash pollution' risk is likely to be linked to compaction from travelling wet fields, as there are fewer days in spring appropriate for spreading compared with autumn. Soil compaction will in turn increase run-off erosion and phosphate pollution. ADAS have estimated that ammonia emissions will increase by around 10% and phosphorus loss into watercourses will increase by around 30% as a result of spring spreading, and difficulty with incorporating manures.

The full Impact Assessment report can be found by searching online for 'Impact Assessment Farming Rules for Water AHDB' or visiting <https://ahdb.org.uk/an-assessment-of-the-impact-of-farming-rules-for-water> or via an email to the MGA office.