

# MGA TIMES

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## MAIZE HARVEST

### Harvest time again!

Maize harvest is fast approaching. Enclosed with this mailing is Simon Draper's full harvesting guide, Simon stresses the importance of assessing crops as soon as possible to determine likely harvest dates and organise contractors. Once the crop reaches 22% it dries at around 2% per week and ideally should be harvested at 28%. Dry matters ranging from 17% to 24% were reported on 1<sup>st</sup> September on crops in Norfolk and Sussex - your crop could be ready sooner than you thought!

## MGA STUDY TOUR

### 2-Day Study Tour to the Netherlands

Traditionally MGA have run a Winter Tour each year, giving members the opportunity to gain knowledge and information from scientific research centres and farms in another area.

This was not possible last year due to the restrictions of Foot and Mouth, but we are pleased to inform members that a 2-day tour has been organised to visit commercial farms and Lelystad research station in the Netherlands in November. Full details of the tour are enclosed with this mailing.

Please note that places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis so please reserve your place early to avoid disappointment.

## ADDITIVE TRIAL

### Additive Trial Results Enclosed

A summary of the results of the study, commissioned by MGA and undertaken at CEDAR, to clarify the financial and physical benefits of using additives to improve the quality of maize silage, is enclosed. The study was undertaken in response to members' requests to determine the benefit that might be obtained by using an additive on the maize that will be fed in the summer.

The 44 page full trial report is available to all MGA members on request from the office. Please contact Noelle by telephone, fax or email if you would like a copy.

## SHOWS

### Come and see us at the Dairy Event

We would be pleased to see members at the Dairy Event (18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> September), and welcome you to visit our stand, which will be in Cattle Shed 2 this year.

The theme of this year's stand is 'Practical solutions from the MGA' and will focus on practical solutions to problems being faced by dairy farmers including simplification in choosing varieties for individual farms, optimising the maize crop's dry matter (by way of dry matter assessment demonstrations) and utilising animal manures under NVZ legislation. The value to farmer's profitability of the association's R&D activities will also be featured.

Our agronomist Ruth Baker will be present to carry out the Dry Matter testing demonstrations and answer any agronomy queries. Our ruminant consultant, Chris Savery will also be present during the show to answer any questions about feeding as will John Morgan (MGA minerals).

### Bath & West Dairy Show

We will also be at this year's Dairy Show, which takes place at the Royal Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

## FEEDING MEETINGS

### Post-harvest meetings on 3 MGA demo sites

We are hoping to organise post-harvest meetings on 3 of the MGA demo sites in Cornwall, the Midlands and Lancashire. The aim of the meetings is to assess the harvested crop, discuss the results of the demonstrations and provide the opportunity to consider feeding and utilisation of the crop. Dates and full details have yet to be finalised and will be sent to members as soon as possible.

## GRAIN MAIZE PROGRESS

### Positive moves for grain maize

MGA have been investigating the potential for producing grain maize in the UK and have undertaken trials for the past two years. A visit to Smith's Mills to discuss UK production and supply proved useful last month. The mill is very keen to use English grown maize for baby food production, for which they would require approximately 700 tonnes a year. MGA have proved that (in specific areas) the production is possible - more work is required on acceptable varieties.

## MGA EX-CHAIRMAN

### Where are they now?

Members may remember MGA ex-Chairman Philip Osborne, who moved

to Tasmania a few years ago. Current Chairman, Charles Moore, visited the Osbornes whilst on holiday with his wife Jane and learnt how they were getting on since their move from their farm in Somerset.

*From Charles Moore...*

'Philip, Louise, Tom and Abby gave us a very warm welcome & provided 6-star accommodation in their Georgian style farmhouse.

In the short time they have been in Tasmania they have transformed the traditional sheep farm into a highly productive business, however life is certainly at a much steadier pace supported by a more reliable climate allowing work to be carried out at ones own convenience!

New Zealand has just had two good years following de-regulation and are now, as one dairy farmer described it, being treated like peasants by milk buyers. Tasmania certainly appears to be offering the best opportunity at the moment for any would be immigrants.

The Osbornes will fill in the details of the operation in their own words, they have asked me to tell you that they will be pleased to see anyone that is travelling in that part of the world.'

*From the Osbornes ....*

'In 1994 we continued to farm as much as possible due to the restrictions of milk quotas and other red-tape exercises instilled upon us by the EEC. In 1997 we travelled to the opposite side of the world to New Zealand to meet up with our son Ben who had been working in Australia - we loved it but Ben said that Australia was even better!

When we got home our minds were in a whirl, we still had the value of milk quota, the cows were at their peak and the farm was totally up together, yet we could see a lot of hard work ahead to make a living to just stand still, so we decided to sell our farm. We moved out of Rode Farm in Somerset in September 1997, the farm sold well, the cows at the peak of the market and the same with the value of milk quota. Our aim initially was to purchase an arable farm in the UK yet all the city money was coming out and keeping the land/property values at an unrealistic high for the capital outlay and arable incomes, even though heavily subsidised were falling. Therefore, to keep Philip occupied, we

purchased two derelict barns to renovate. Luckily we bought the site low, renovated to a high standard and sold high.

During this time, both our sons were nearing the end of their educations and a decision had to be made for the future. Philip having more time was voted Chairman of the MGA (having been involved with MGA for a number of years). Towards the end of Philip's term of Chairmanship we took another trip, this time to Australia - mainly Tasmania, parts of which are like Devon, others like Salisbury plains. After touring around the island and looking at farms available at that time we decided to purchase a large farm 'down south', then flew home and applied for our visa's!

Everything was in place to the point of signing contracts when unfortunately the seller refused. We therefore picked ourselves up, phoned a few agents and soon found another farm for sale privately. Three days after seeing the property we put in an offer on Fairfield, Epping Forest, which was accepted and we took this over in December 2000.

Unfortunately Fairfield was in quite a sad state - work had been started to improve the property but it was quite run down and abused. Still, we liked the challenge and after doing a lock, stock and barrel purchase of livestock and equipment a plan was drawn up to get the farm up and running. The first job was to get the irrigation worked out, with budgets it was decided to put a large 280 acre centre pivot, new mains were installed and a new pumping shed. A dyke, which had been started to keep the river off the cropping land, was finished and the reclamation of the marshes began.

After a while it could be seen that the staff 'inherited' with the farm were not up to speed and a sheep consultant, Andrew Calvert, was taken on board and now with the right advice, correct purchases and brilliant staff the sheep side of the business is progressing excellently!

The cropping side is going leaps and bounds - putting the goodness back into soils that have been abused by continuous potato and failed crops. Good poppy and grass seed contracts were obtained and our first cropping year went very well considering the fact that we were on a steep learning curve.

As we progress we find that a lot of our knowledge can be applied to Australian agriculture - especially our experience with machinery, getting the

right tool for the right job can cut down costs and field expenses considerably. We purchased a seed drill, but it is also a rotovator and a press, so only one pass over the land is necessary (not the usual 3), a sprayer is also a necessary item, the expense of which has been justified by 'contract spraying' a few select progressive farmers in the near vicinity - this side of the business is mainly being run by our son Tom, who emigrated with us. Tom is doing such a good job that he has been approached to 'contract' out pea growing because of his correct drilling and spraying regime and showing the pea company the best way of growing the crop!

This year Fairfield has contracts for peas, beans, grass seeds, clover seeds and poppies to name a few - all of which are being carefully integrated into the rotation system. Improvements are ongoing. This year lateral irrigation will be installed on the south side of the farm, planting of new native windbreaks, bush areas have been fenced and drainage ditches installed on the marshes.

The sheep have recently been sheared and everyone has commented on the improvements made in the shearing sheds with shutes for the sheep to leave the shed and new penning systems to the rear. Now with the results just in there is a vast improvement in the quality of wool due to the health care regime in place for the stock.

We have enjoyed our first 18 months here immensely and are now getting into the change around in seasons. Christmas being hot was very strange at first!

We have always learned to question 'why' and when we don't get a satisfactory answer there is always someone at the end of a phone who can help! We think this placed us in a unique position - applying our knowledge and expertise and hard work into making Fairfield a progressive farm. We think we are getting it right and it is really satisfying when total strangers come up and say 'Fairfield is looking 100% better, the stock, the land - well done!' which has happened on a couple of occasions lately and is extremely rewarding. So we are carrying on the good work.

We haven't forgotten our other son Ben - he decided to do his own thing in the UK for a while and came out last September to surprise his Mum on her birthday with his partner, he was offered three jobs whilst out here so is coming over in September to work with Bauer Irrigation equipment - so this Christmas will be even more special!!