



We look at harvest predictions and get some planting advice in the latest of the Maize Matters series, sponsored by KWS.

Predictions for next year's maize crop

Maize yields and quality are likely to fall short of expectations on many farms this year, leading to predictions plantings will be down by around 10 per cent for 2013. A swing towards early-maturing varieties – which appear to have suffered the least in a very difficult season – is also anticipated.

The shortfall in maize plantings next year is likely to be confined mainly to marginal areas, such as Lancashire, Cumbria, County Durham, North Wales, Cornwall and North Devon. Numerous growers in these locations will not achieve the 12-14 tonnes/hectare of DM threshold, which is generally considered to make the crop a worthwhile proposition. They may turn to alternative feed-stuffs, such as wholecrop cereals, pulses, triticale and even fodder beet. In some cases, livestock producers will choose to expand their grassland acreage, although questions are already being



Francis Dunne

raised over grass seed availability.

The cold, wet weather has been a particular problem for those who selected the later-maturing varieties and it is thought the newer, early-maturing types will become more popular in the future. These have been bred specifically to cope with the cli-

mate in Northern Europe and rapid progress has been made over the past few years. Many will achieve yields and quality to rival the traditional late-maturing varieties and their early vigour will get the crop off to a good start, if conditions are unfavourable after sowing.

Francis Dunne of Field Options

DISEASE RISK

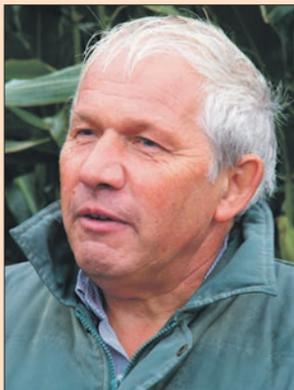
NORMALLY, eyespot in maize is limited to coastal regions, but this year has seen cases countrywide, says Simon Draper of the Maize Growers' Association. He has been advising growers to use a full rate of fungicide on crops showing signs of infection.

"Losses due to eyespot can be as high as 80 per cent, in extreme cases," he says. "Fields may be difficult to access, but treatment is essential, given the severity of the disease. A high

ground clearance machine will be needed to apply the fungicide, to avoid causing damage to the crop."

He urges growers who are looking at alternative forage crops not to be too hasty.

"Understandably, there has been a lot of disappointment with maize crops this time. But I would ask producers not to base any decisions on this year's results alone, as growing conditions have been particularly challenging," says Mr Draper.



Simon Draper



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concur early varieties have proved a safer bet this year. The ultra-early Recolt (KWS) and the very early Severus (KWS) have emerged as two star performers in his company's trial plots.

"In a year like this, early-maturing varieties can out-perform late-maturing types, because a plant which has not fully ripened will never reach its true potential," he said.

Drainage

"However, I personally believe soil type and rotational position have a greater influence on harvest results than geographical location. Fields earmarked for growing maize need good drainage. The plant's roots can stretch down as far as two metres, but as soon as they become saturated with water, growth will cease. Unfortu-

HARVEST AND PRESERVATION

THERE is little growers can do to salvage crops which have been under severe stress all season and are in poor condition in the run-up to harvest. However cutting and preservation techniques can be manipulated, to maximise quality, according to Leigh Berrisford of NWF Agriculture.

He says a longer chop length will reduce the overall surface area of the crop. This should minimise run-off, in cases where dry matter is lower than average.

The risk of mycotoxin contamination is significant this year, due to the high rainfall and humidity, he adds.

"I would strongly recommend the use of an additive containing a fungal inhibitor, to protect crop quality over the winter months. It will help to prevent overheating and spoilage. On some farms, we may not start to see real problems developing in untreated crops until the spring,



Leigh Berrisford

when forage stocks are running low.

"Additives also benefit stored maize by reducing acidity, which can make the feedstuff unpalatable to livestock and adversely affect intakes. At a cost of less than £1.50 per tonne treated, it would be a false economy to leave it out, given the conditions we have been experiencing."

nately, this scenario has prevailed this season.

"The best chance of getting a good crop in any area is to sow it after grass. The soil structure will be rich in fibre, which suits maize. By contrast, growers may struggle on fields with a second or third maize

crop, and the challenge will be even greater, if minimum cultivation techniques have been adopted. One lesson learned this time round is to avoid sub-soiling if the soil is moist – anyone who pressed on regardless has found they have done more harm than good."

For more advice and features, follow Maize Matters online at www.farmersguardian.com/maizematters