



Harvest plans come under the spotlight in the penultimate article in our Maize Matters series, sponsored by KWS.

# Location plays key role in yield results

**M**ost experts predict yields to be down by an average 10-25 per cent this year, depending on location. The poor growing conditions experienced countrywide make it more important than ever to take the correct decisions on late-stage management and harvest date.

The 2012 maize growing season presented challenges from the outset and the weather continues to cause problems for many growers, who are worried about their final results, reports John Burgess of KWS.

"We have entered a period of low temperatures and the high risk of frosts," says Mr Burgess. "Stems and leaves have started to die back prematurely, with the base of the plant turning brown. In some cases, the cobs on these plants have not fully ripened and this situation could lead to an increased risk of acidosis and low starch contents."

"It should still be possible for most producers to achieve moderate silage quality, but it is important to avoid rushing in and harvesting too early. The cobs must be fully mature, or crops will not reach their feed value potential."



"This year, a high percentage of maize plants are shorter than average, which means cob content is actually higher [typically more than 50 per cent]. Harvesting prematurely will compromise yields to a great extent, especially when compared with 2011."

## Early-maturing

The wet spring and cool summer strongly favoured early-maturing varieties, he says. They are more flexible than their mid-late maturing rivals, which may also struggle to finish.

"The best results appear to be where early-maturing varieties were sown rather later than usual," he says. "Early varieties tend to have a wider sowing window. Very early sowing – on April 10-15, for example – led to many crops suffering severe stress. By contrast, early varieties, sown around the beginning of May, have performed fairly well and are on their way to full maturity."

There have been reports of

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growers baling unsuccessful crops as a last resort, but Mr Burgess warns this practice could lead to soil contamination and the resulting product could only be fed fresh. He expects this drastic action to be limited to a very small minority of cases.

Neil Matson of Agricultural Central Trading says 2012 has highlighted the need for a 'back to basics' approach.

"There is no doubt that maize is a tremendous crop to feed to livestock, but it is not as tolerant as cereals if it is grown in the wrong place or sown into soils with poor structure," he says.



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To give the crop the best chance of reaching its potential, the tillage should be fine and open, with the top surface loose, to allow for the development of deep rooting into the available air pockets. Drilling into compacted ground must be avoided at all costs.

Three varieties have demonstrated 'outstanding performance' in trial plots this year, he says.

"Kontender (KWS) has managed to come out on top, despite all the difficulties. Garland and Ambition (both Limagrain) have also shown great merit. But the fact remains that on some farms, especially in the North, maize growing is accompanied by an element of risk."

## Lighter soils

On some lighter soils, high levels of nutrient have been washed away by heavy rain, and crops have been looking 'starved' and pale, he says.

"Fertiliser is very important for maize, so any losses over the growing season will take their toll on performance. Growers who have applied foliar nitrogen to the standing crop have seen

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a good response. This might be something to plan for next year; additional nitrogen can always be withdrawn from the spray programme, if it turns out to be unnecessary."

Plants are expected to have a higher moisture content this harvest time, so the use of an additive on crops which come off the field in lower-than-average condition may be beneficial.

"The main goal is to prevent the clamp from overheating, which will lead to spoilage," he says. "A biological product will produce a range of acids, helping to keep the crop cool and stable, while a mould and yeast inhibitor can also reduce wastage. In a year such as this, growers need to take advantage of every available option to preserve the quality of their feedstocks over the winter."



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## TIPS FOR THIS YEAR'S HARVEST

- Avoid rushing the start of harvest and make sure cobs are fully mature
- Use an additive if crops have a higher moisture content than normal
- Prevent the clamp from overheating, which can lead to spoilage

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