



In association with 

In the first of our 2013 Maize Matters series we take a look back at lessons learned from last year and look ahead to this year's crop with advice on nutrient planning.

## Early varieties popular to pull harvest forward

**E**arlier predictions the UK maize acreage would be reduced for 2013 have been reversed, with current expectations suggesting plantings will be slightly higher than last year.

A number of factors are deemed responsible, including a shortage of spring seed and the fact high rainfall has prevented seedbed preparation in many parts of the country. This has left a number of growers with fields intended for cereals left unsown.

Maize, which can be drilled as late as mid-May, provides a useful alternative, allowing time to re-condition soils and boost forage stocks for next winter.

### Varietal choice

Francis Dunne of Field Options believes many producers have accepted the 2012 growing season in general was exceptionally poor, with maize not the only crop to suffer from a decline in yield and quality. Most are looking for a slightly earlier variety, to pull harvest dates forward in the autumn, he says.

"The analysis of varietal performance in cases where the previous year was challenging is a very useful exercise. Two early varieties which survived well in the low temperatures



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and flooding are Severus (KWS) and Adept (Limagrain). The ultra-early Recolt (KWS) and the very early Activate (Limagrain) also withstood a high degree of pressure. All four varieties produced good dry matter yields and reached comparatively high quality standards, both in our own trials and those for the Maize Descriptive List."

The best forage diets are made up of maize silage, mixed with grass silage and wholecrop cereals, he adds.

"Blended forages spread risk and produce a feed on which ruminants will perform well. This does not necessarily mean chosen maize varieties need to be the highest for starch. Cell wall digestibility is also important, as high level varieties will break

down quickly in the rumen and go a long way towards improving dry matter intakes.

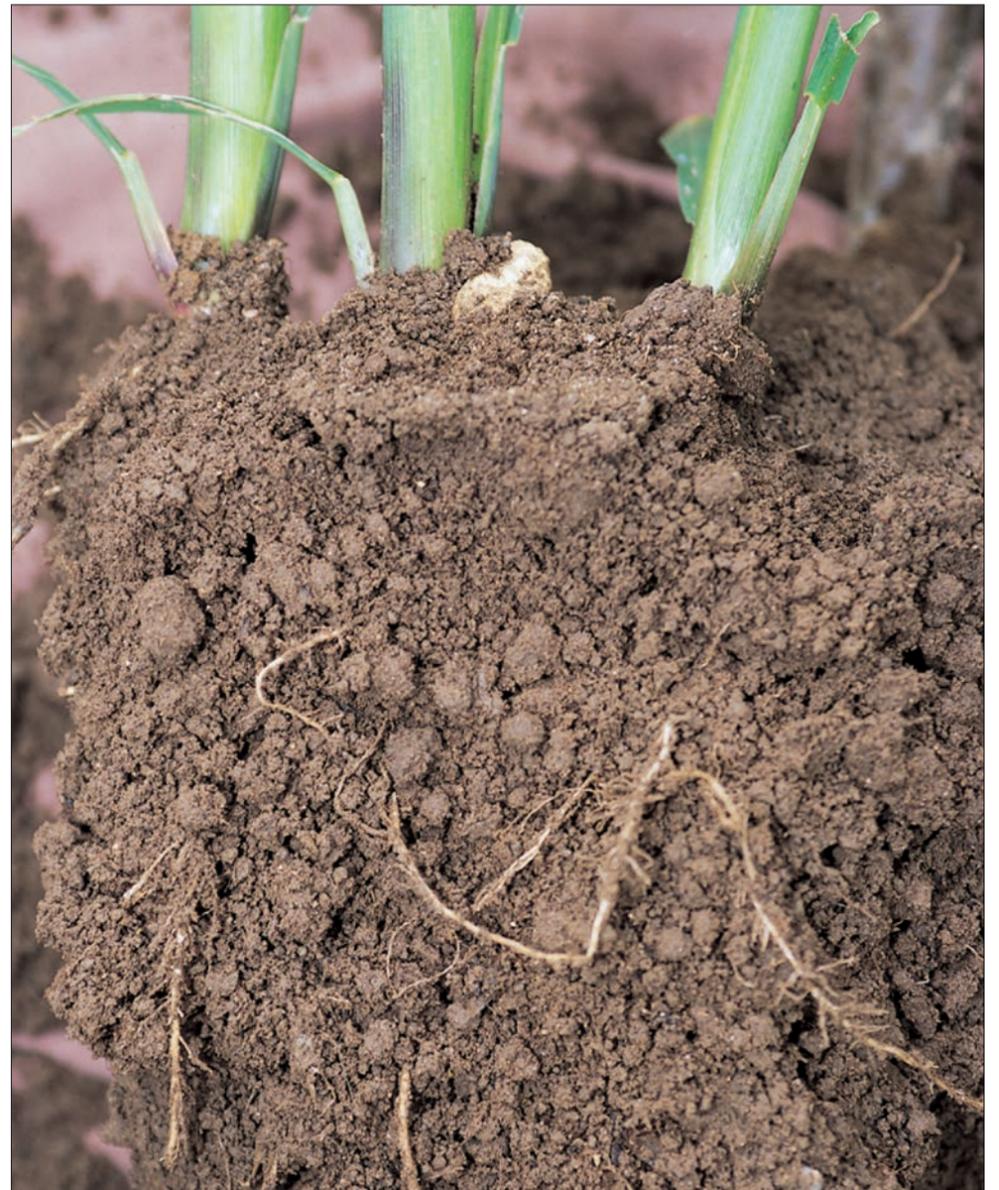
"Adept, and the very early Lapriora, from KWS, were bred for their grain but make very good dual-purpose choices. Last year, Lapriora produced the best starch yields in Northern Ireland, which some people consider to be a marginal area."

### Nutrient management

Fertiliser planning is going to be crucial this year, as soils are severely depleted, according to Brendan Paul of Agrii. Persistent heavy rainfall has washed away many essential nutrients and levels must be replenished, if maize crops are to perform to their potential, he says.

Placed or starter fertiliser is a good option and can be applied at drilling, explains Mr Paul. Some products contain nitrogen and phosphate only, while others have a wider range of nutrients, such as zinc, manganese and sulphur. At an average cost of about £6/ha (£2.50/acre), he recommends using this technique to help maize plants crop get off to a good start. Products which supply a range of nutrients are likely to give the best results this year, he adds.

"Historically, forage maize growers have relied heavily on



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farmyard manure and slurry to feed the growing crop. But fields where starter fertiliser was used benefited greatly last year, and I think this situation will apply again.

"I can't see how growers are going to achieve early drilling in 2013. From what I have seen, soils in all regions are too cold and wet. Maize is going to need every advantage available, to maximise yield and quality potential. There is no economic sense in trying to make savings on crop nutrition in a year like this. It could take as long as two years to recover from the damage that was inflicted on the soil during the 2012 growing season.

"In my opinion, the industry has focused its efforts too much on the processes which are going on above ground and used biomass levels as an indicator of vigour. But we still have a lot to learn about what is going on beneath ground level."

Nutrient planning expert Peter Hoey says producers whose land falls within an NVZ may require



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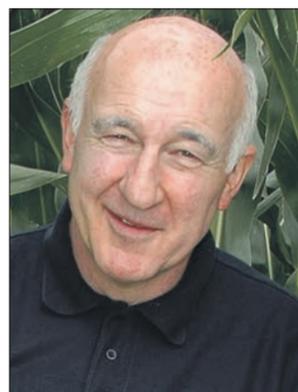
more nitrogen than NMax levels permit, but that no derogation will be applied.

### NVZs

He says the set limits fail to take account of the fact nitrogen availability in the soil is lower on farms where slurry or poultry manure has been applied in autumn, with the figure at about 25 per cent. Meanwhile, the availability of these nutrients, when put on in the spring, is likely to be closer to 50 per cent.

"There is no recognition of these differing availability figures," stresses Mr Hoey. "Anyone in an NVZ who uses slurry or poultry manure must make sure they do not exceed the permitted nitrogen levels," he says.

"There are concerns maize crops will need additional nitrogen, perhaps using a standard fertiliser, especially this year. But the limits are strictly enforceable and Single Farm Payment penalties will apply if they are exceeded."



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### NITROGEN RECOMMENDATION SERVICE

THE Maize Growers Association (MGA) offers a nitrogen recommendation service to its members. Using a 'Nitrogen Predictor' form, which can be downloaded from the website,

participants are asked to provide individual field details.

These include information such as previous nitrogen applications, nutrient types, soil type, variety classification and expected harvested

date. The MGA will return the completed form with recommendations for application levels. **■** More details online at [www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk](http://www.maizegrowersassociation.co.uk)