



The 2013 maize crop is looking more promising than it did in 2012 at this stage, but the jury is still out on whether it will beat last year in terms of overall performance.

Achieving the best out of a short season

Individual growers in the South East and East Anglia have opted for a wide range of drilling dates, with early-sown crops just starting to take hold, reports Ed Stevens of Hutchinsons.

"Given we are expecting a shorter season in 2013, those varieties which are showing early vigour will have a headstart. Hopefully they will continue to thrive as the summer progresses," he says.

He describes plant numbers as 'quite good', against the backdrop of 2012.

"There have been some losses; mainly due to wire-worm issues and on heavier land, where it was difficult to achieve a fine seedbed. In these situations, emergence has been a little disappointing."

In the past, Mr Stevens has recommended the application of herbicides at the four to five leaf stage. However, he has now revised his opinion.

Challenging

"Conditions have been challenging and I am now advising growers to spray earlier.



"I usually recommend the use of a starter fertiliser and this year it has paid dividends"

RICHARD MILLAR



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SIMON TRENARY

"On farms which have experienced a flush of weeds, it would be worth going on with a residual herbicide at first-leaf emergence. This will catch the weeds before they become competitive and start intercepting the light and moisture required by the maize plants. Cranesbill has been a particular problem this year for some of my clients, along with knot-grass."

Simon Trenary from Countrywide Farmers points out phosphate deficiency is apparent within a number of crops in his area – the South West.

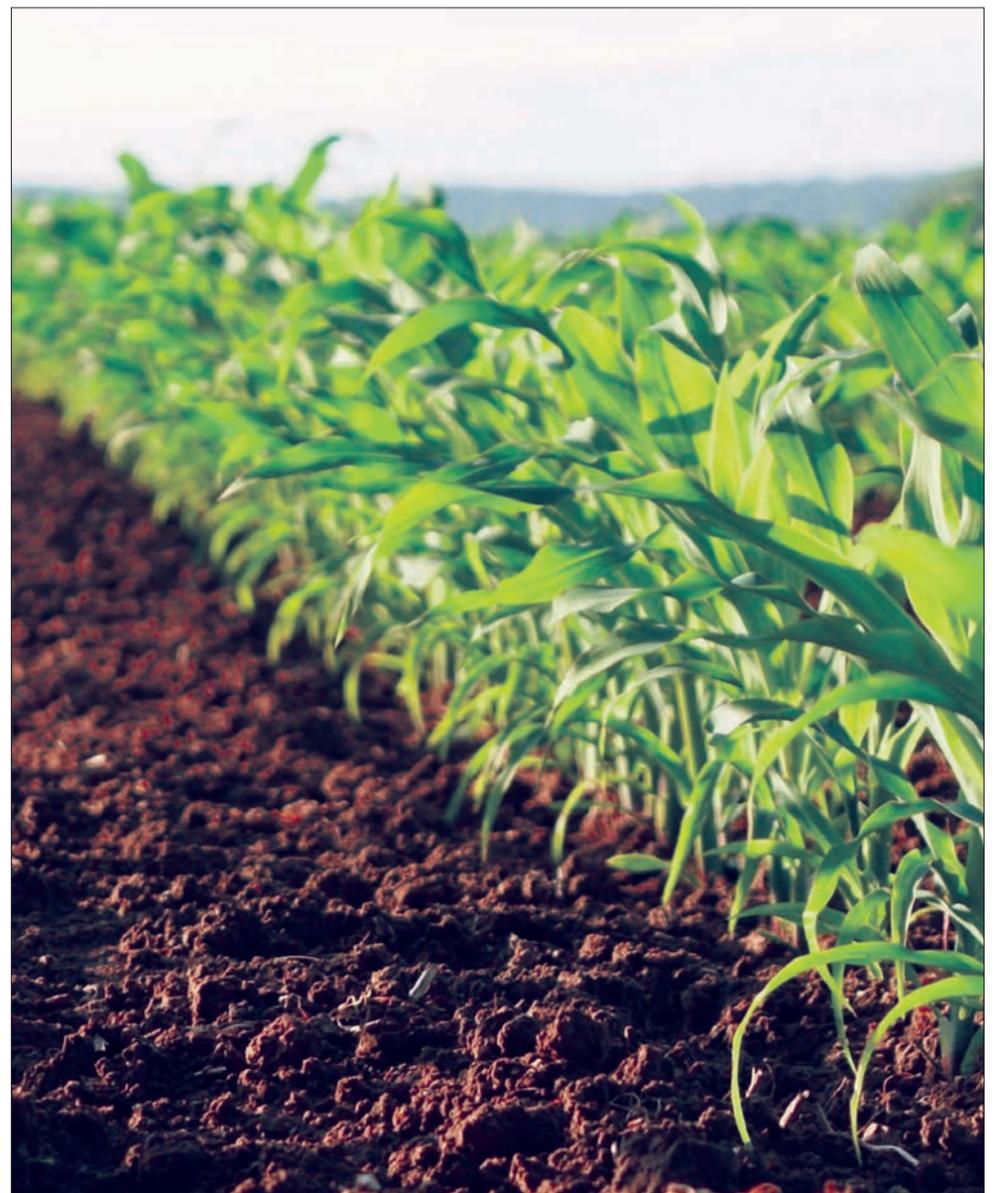
"There may have been sufficient quantities of phosphate in the ground, but soils were slow to warm up, following the cold spring," says Mr Trenary, of Countrywide Farmers. "Added to that, maize plants have been relatively immobile and therefore access to the nutrient has been limited."

"The situation has been compounded by shallow rooting, which has been fairly common. An application of foliar phosphate might help, although it must be used with care. The phrase 'knee high by the end of July' is unlikely to be appropriate on most farms this year."

Foliar feed

Richard Millar of County Crops agrees foliar feeds have a place in modern maize growing systems. Foliar zinc is one of the most beneficial ingredients, in his opinion, as it helps to strengthen the plant. This makes it better equipped to withstand any challenges later on in the season.

"I often suggest growers use a foliar feed which also contains a growth stimulant. When applied at the same time as a



Despite usually recommending using herbicides at the four or five leaf stage, Ed Stevens says the challenging conditions and shorter growing season mean growers should consider spraying earlier.

herbicide product, it should go a long way towards the protection of the leaves against scorching.

"Foliar sprays which contain phosphate can also be useful in early season, to plug the gap between the time when the plant relies on getting its nutrients from the seed and the stage where it starts to put down its roots."

Crops in his region – the North West – have 'greened up' nicely after a difficult spell, he says.

"Maize was looking backward in this part of the world, but it has forged ahead and most producers are fairly pleased with their crops to date," says Mr Millar.

Fertiliser

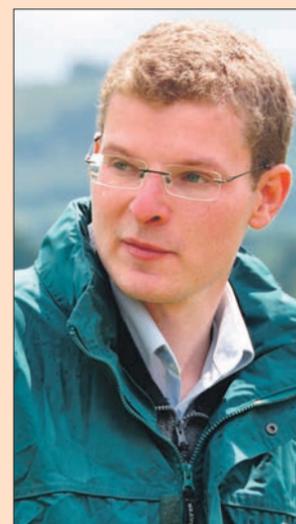
"I usually recommend the use of a starter fertiliser and this year it has paid dividends. If you put two crops side by side, it would be easy to pick out the maize which has been boosted by an application of starter fertiliser containing ni-

trogen and phosphate; it would be slightly ahead of the non-treated plants, as well as looking healthier."

The perceived value of maize as a livestock feed is increasing, he says, as volatile weather continues to put pressure on all forage stocks.

A high percentage of growers are now treating maize more like an arable crop and have been prepared to spend additional money on inputs, in recent years.

FORAGE PROSPECTS



John Burgess

KWS specialist, John Burgess is reluctant to make a firm prediction about maize performance this year, but says he feels 2013 will be an improvement on 2012. However, first cut grass silages have been short on protein and low in sugar on many farms, mainly due to the cold start to the growing season.

Cereals for wholecropping are not on course to produce the 'rocket fuel' required to keep dairy cows, for example, in peak production over the winter.

"In general, forage stocks are likely to be tight," says Mr Burgess. "I do not ex-

pect wholecrop to play as important a role as it did last year, when growers were struggling to manage their maize and grass silages," says Mr Burgess.

Wholecrop

"Despite the additional focus placed on it in 2012, wholecrop tended to be lacking in yield and quality and we might see a repeat of that this time. The cereals in the ground are already giving cause for concern; the aim would be to achieve 550-600 ears/sq.m in wheat, whereas the average figure is closer to 400 at present."