

Place your seed order early

Selecting the maize variety best suited to the growing conditions on your unit is key. So don't delay seed ordering this season. Make decision early to ensure you can have the variety you want.

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Many producers delay when it comes to ordering their forage maize seed. But this plan could back fire this year, according to Limagrain's Tim Richmond, and for several reasons. Greater demand for seed, Brexit and potential seed import issues, and a ban on seed treatment.

"The typical pattern of maize seed sales is that only around 50% of seed is ordered by the end of February, with the balance ordered late, often in April," he explains. "Most years, producers are still able to buy their first-choice variety and all the seed they require, but this season looks like it will be different."



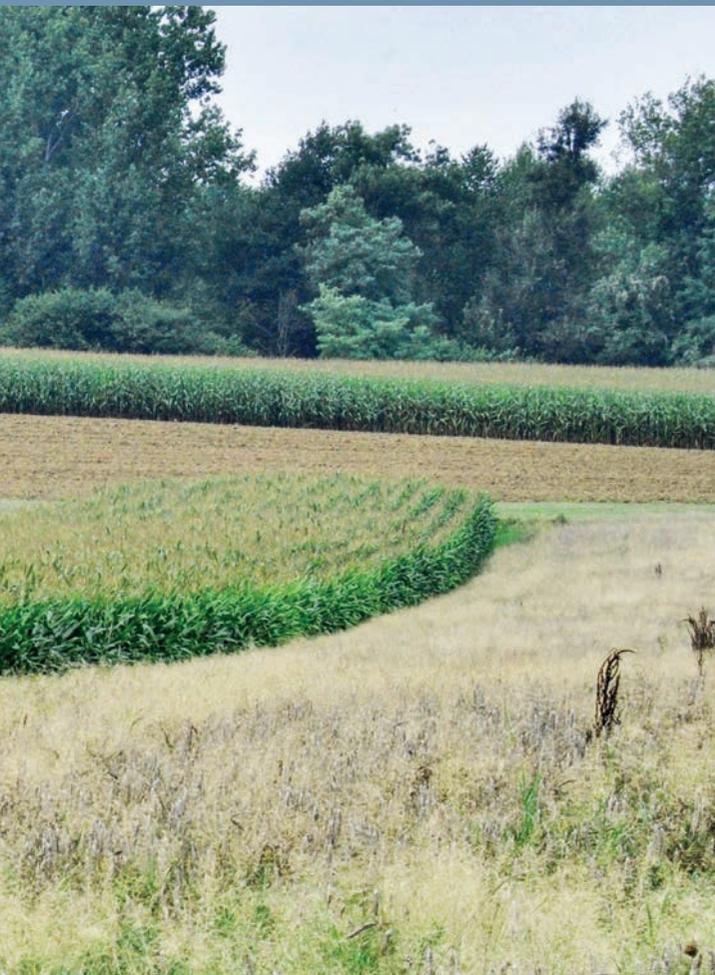
Peter Johns, producer:

"I now ensure that I get seed ordered well in advance"

Not only is demand for forage maize seed likely to increase, as producers look to rebuild forage stocks after summer 2018's dry conditions, but the forecast of tightening milk prices, and likely feed cost inflation fuelled by exchange rates, means milk from forage will be even more important.

"Growing extra hectares of maize is a good way to increase total forage production and there is increased interest in growing maize on contract as a way to increase 2019 output. Increased demand could mean that seed stocks for some varieties may be in short supply later in the season," he explains.

Producers saw the benefits of early maturing options with good early vigour in 2018, with crops establishing and growing quickly. The earlier harvest also means crops are taken in good conditions and, with silage made sooner, it can be incorporated into ration diets earlier. "The market has been moving towards earlier varieties for several years. If demand remains high, those looking to buy seed late may find that only later maturing options are available. If, by ordering late, you miss out



on the better performing varieties, the consequence could be that you have to grow an older variety with a resultant reduction in yield, feed value and milk from forage.”

This year also sees the most widely used maize seed treatment being phased out. Mesurol, which is extensively used to reduce problems with frit fly as well as bird damage, will no longer be available. The supply of treated seed is unlikely to continue into April, particularly for the most popular varieties.

“Seed houses will be running down supplies of Mesurol-treated seed because any stocks left at the end of the season will have to be destroyed. For the same reason, distributors will be reluctant to carry excess stocks as the season progresses. Together, these factors mean that the supply of treated seed will be reduced as the season unwinds.

“And sowing untreated seed will increase the risk of poorer establishment and greater losses as a result of bird damage. So by ordering early you will be able to ensure that you get the variety you want, and that the seed has been treated to help promote good establishment.”

Brexit issue

As all maize seed either originates from, or is packaged in, Europe before being shipped across the channel, Mr Richmond also warns that depending on the terms of any Brexit deal there may be an impact on the supply of maize seed into the UK.



Tim Richmond,
maize seed manager:
**“This season looks like it
will be different”**

“Any increase in border and customs checks will potentially delay seed getting to distributors and on to farms. As yet, it is impossible to predict what may happen, but it may be prudent to act early to reduce the risk of possible disruption.”

He adds that the benefits of ordering maize seed early will far outweigh any potential benefits of a delay.

“The most common justifications for late ordering are the hope of late season deals and avoiding having seed in store for too long. But when set against ensuring that you get the variety you want and that seed being treated, the benefits of delaying are insignificant this year.”

The benefits of maize seed selection were put into sharp focus for Devon-based producer Peter Johns in 2018, when he grew two different varieties.

“Maize is a vital part of our system,” says Peter, who runs a 200-cow Holstein herd near Shebbear in North Devon. “We aim to feed it 365 days a year and it accounts for up to 40% of the forage in the milking ration. The starch is crucial to maintain milk quality, as we are on a constituent-based contract.”

The herd is currently averaging 9,700 litres, at 4.08% butterfat and 3.27% protein, and milk is sold to Dairy Crest.

Variety selection

“We ran out of maize for a few weeks in 2018 and when we finally re-introduce it to the ration, yields increased by two litres per cow per day.”

With land a limiting factor, and farming at 165 metres above sea level on heavy soils, variety choice is key for Peter who wants high yields and quality, combined with early maturity. He has had considerable success with Ambition, but in 2018 was encouraged to try another variety as well.

“It is the first time I have grown two varieties and was genuinely surprised with the difference,” he says. “I drilled all the fields with the two varieties, side by side, and throughout the season the Ambition was stronger. At harvest, it was more than 30cm taller and the fields all had ‘waves’. The cobs were also bigger on the Ambition plants, meaning I had compromised quantity and quantity by not sticking to Ambition.”

Working with Harpers Feeds’ Glen Johns, he calculated that, across the 35 hectares of maize grown, he lost around 100 tonnes of forage due to the shorter crop and smaller cob size. And ME content will also have been lower.

“The lesson I learnt is to identify the variety best suited to the farm and to make sure I get seed ordered well in advance,” says Peter. |