



The Farm Consultancy Group

Issue 112 - February 2020



Welcome to our 112th edition of the newsletter. Included in this month's newsletter are articles on your health in farming, soil sampling, sulphur, maize seed, commodities updates, mixing licences, calf sales and improving farm finances.

Your feedback and comments are most welcome. If clarification is required, please contact the article contributor or for more articles and news visit www.fcagric.com.

Edited by Gerard Finnan of David Bardgett Ltd and The Farm Consultancy Group
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Fit for Farming? - Gerard Finnan

One Careful Owner, this high-performance machine will run smoothly for a lifetime with a little care and attention. Minimal spare parts and basic maintenance required.

If you read these previous statements in the process of buying a second-hand machine, you would think that this is too good to be true or it must be very expensive to purchase..... But this is an apt description of our minds and bodies. As a farmer (male or female), it is the best bit of kit on the farm, yet how often is it MOT'd? How often do we ignore the warning signals and not take the right fuel and rest to keep the body and mind on the road ahead?

Fit for Farming is a booklet published by FCN and Men's Health Forum which highlights:

- How to be good to your body
- How to be good to your brain
- How to handle the ups and downs
- Including managing all the occupational health hazards of the job.



Men & Women versions can be ordered at www.menshealthforum.org.uk
or contact FCN on 01788 510866.

Soil Sampling - Last Opportunity This Winter! - Gerard Finnan

Inside this issue:

Sulphur	2
Maize Seed	2
Commodities Update	3
Mixing Licences	3
Calf Sales Register	4
Farming for Profit?	4

At £20/sample of a 6ha field, it is a cheap information tool if acted on. A soil analysis result will provide you with pH, P, K & Mg available levels in the soil.

A 200-cow dairy farmer will spend £20,000 on purchased fertiliser and spend £10,000 applying slurry to his 120ha farm with 20 fields. If all fields were soil sampled once every three years, it would cost just over £1/ha/year. It is only expensive if the results are not acted on.



Ensuring your soils are at optimum pH will ensure the £20k you spend on fertiliser will be efficiently used and not wasted if other important nutrients are missing from the soil. Analysis results will highlight where to apply the slurry on your farm. There is no point continuing to apply slurry to high P & K fields at the expense of suboptimal P & K fields. When money is tight it is even more imperative to apply slurry and purchased P & K to the fields that will give you the best response and biggest financial return.

Contact the office today on 01935 850093 to get your soil sampling pack and take some soil samples now, before you apply any slurry or purchased P & K to the soil.

A copy of this newsletter can be downloaded from our website @ www.davidbardgett.co.uk



Sulphur - Phil Cooper

The use of Sulphur in grassland has been underestimated for many years now. Historically, deposits from industry have supplied sufficient Sulphur for crop demand. This is no longer the case. Sulphur is more available to crops in heavy soils or those with high organic matter quantities. Lighter free draining soils lack Sulphur. Sulphur is closely linked to nitrogen use in plants. It supports nitrogen in the production of protein. This is especially important for grass being cut for silage to ensure high protein levels in silage.

Poly  **sulphate**

Symptoms of Sulphur deficiency can easily be mistaken for nitrogen deficiency. Young leaves will be pale yellow, and plants can have stunted growth. Normal soil testing cannot identify a Sulphur deficiency so tissue testing should be used. This can measure either the Sulphur concentration or the S:N ratio. For grass the concentration should be 0.25% in the dry matter or an S:N of 13:1.

Sulphur applications will vary depending on the level of slurry and FYM applied. Organic manures have more readily available Sulphur compared to inorganic fertilisers but should be used in the spring as Sulphur is prone to leaching in the autumn/winter. The following is a guide to the volumes needed:

- Silage Grass: 40kg SO₃/ha prior to each cut.
- Grazing Grass: 20-30 kg SO₃/ha in the spring and in mid-season.

To discuss your fertiliser plans and requirements for 2020, please contact Phil Cooper (FACTS) at pcooper@fcgagric.com or call 07798 673665.

Maize Seed - Andrew Jones



The maize seed trade seems to start earlier and earlier every year! Last year it was on the back of Brexit, this year it is on the back of the limited availability of Mesuro treated seed.

Some Mesuro treated seed is actually available again, this time for the last time (but they've been saying that for three years now!).

However, some of the treated varieties are already sold out as people are buying/booking stocks early. We have already booked orders for varieties that have since sold out, but with the seed not being delivered on farm until April. As Mesuro supplies were limited some seeds are dressed with a product called Korit to help deter birds eating the seed. Korit is supposed to be worse than the Mesuro, so it is likely to only be available for a couple of years!

If you are unable to obtain a seed with a dressing, recent MGA (Maize Growers Association) trials have shown the best way to plant seed was at four inches deep (just longer than the length of a rook's beak). Some form of starting fertiliser needs to be applied to boost the seed growth at this less than ideal depth.

We've had some excellent feedback the last two years, for seed provided by same supplier as follows..... **"Best crop of maize I've seen on the farm in the time I've been here"**.....**"Lovely by name and a lovely crop grown"**.....**"All the neighbours are saying it's the best maize crop in the area"**.....**"Contractor says it's the best maize crop he's harvested this year"**.....

Contact Andrew on 07717 442888 or email andrew@davidbardgett.co.uk , for quotes and getting your maize seed order in asap.

Commodities Update (06/02/2020) - Andrew Jones

Whilst there was much long-term optimism last month, this month the worry is what effect the coronavirus epidemic will have on the world economy.

The pound has fallen about a cent and a half against the dollar, while stable against the euro over the last month. Oil has fallen almost \$15/barrel over the last month, all on the back of fear of slowing demand due to coronavirus.

Since last month the GDT saw an immediate bounce in prices, but the latest one from this week saw a loss again of -4.7% all on the back of coronavirus. Whole & Skim powders lead the fall but other products, such as cheddar, saw a 6% increase.

Milk Powder - Prices have been relatively steady over the last month.

Feed - Prices have been relatively stable over the last month. Soya prices are firm in the short term on news that the Argentinean crusher has not been able to refinance their debt, while ground maize is looking very good value at the moment, compared to wheat, for next winter.



Fertiliser - Well we all had a shock last month with CF suddenly announcing a drop in prices, which caused the rest of the nitrogen market to follow, all on the back of poor wheat plantings this past autumn. It certainly caused some nervousness in the market for a few days with prices literally dropping hour by hour as all the different suppliers decided to fight over what business there was.

There has been a small increase again since the market hit the bottom but there are still some reasonable deals to be done in the market so if you haven't done your fertiliser purchases yet for the spring I suggest you do, simply due to timings, let alone price.

Contact Andrew on 07717 442888, or email andrew@davidbardgett.co.uk for an up to date quote.

Mixing Licences - Andrew Jones

I was recently reminded that if you mix your own feed on farm you need to ensure that you have the correct mixing licence for your farm. You also need licences for mixing additives (R10 licence) or mixing any compound feeds containing premixtures or feed additives (R11 licence).



These products include vitamins & minerals, urea, and propionic acid (when used as a feed preservative).

If you have a mixer on farm that you only use to mix forages, then you need a different licence (R13) than if you are mixing any of the above-mentioned products.

I have become aware recently of a few farms that have failed an inspection by trading standards because they have had the wrong licence. Some inspectors will upgrade incorrect licences on the day without any problems, but you do need licences in the first place.

If mixing urea on farm is a problem, have you ever considered having it pre-mixed in a molasses product to use on farm instead? Not only will it add the required protein but also some sugars to your diet as well.

If you'd like a copy of either the FSA (Food Standards Agency) or the Red Tractor regulations for On Farm Feeding, please contact Andrew on 07717 442888 or andrew@davidbardgett.co.uk and I will email you a copy.

Direct Calf Sales Register - Tom Malleson

With the supply of dairy-bred beef calves likely to increase in the future, securing a reliable supply of healthy calves of known breeding and colostrum status is of critical importance to rearers. We have several clients who have seen huge calf health and therefore financial benefits by buying groups of calves from recommended dairy farmers.

Please get in touch with us if you:

- Have quality beef calves (AI bred) of guaranteed colostrum status from your dairy herd
- Or:
- Are seeking a source of batches of quality, healthy calves to rear

We do encounter reluctance to purchase calves from Jersey-cross cows. The data we are now seeing from clients indicates that this should not be a cause for concern if the calves are sired by AI beef bulls. Interim data (below) is showing that the superior sire genetics outweigh the potential disadvantage of the smaller dam.

	Sire	Dam breed	Age (months)	Weight (kg)	DLWG (kg/d)
Group A	AI Hereford	Jersey cross	20.6	476	0.9
Group B	Stock bull HE	HF	23.8	506	0.7

Which group of calves (A or B) would you pay more for? Don't just look at the calf, get evidence of the genetics used and how they are reared by buying direct from farm.

Contact Tom today with your requirements whether buying or selling, on 07496 760242 or email tommalleson@fcgagric.com

Farming for Profit? - Ed Warren

I have met various farmers and talked at various farm discussion groups over the past year. A lot of the discussion is based around cashflow and profit. Many of you will be making a profit but is your bank balance improving? Do you fully understand your farm finances and how it all works?

One farmer said to me recently his accountant calls every year and runs through the accounts with him. Another said he deals with his Bank Manager mostly by phone.

I attended a team meeting of Midwest Consulting recently and asked the expanding team if they knew what I did. You broker finance was one response! My response was, I actually spend most of my time looking to help farmers improve their financial situation. Are your farm finances in good order? Do they match well with your medium and long-term plans? Do you know how much that interest free HP is really costing you? Can you afford your tax bill?

I regard myself as a farm finance advisor with over 20 years' experience as an Agricultural Bank Manager and Farm Consultant. I look at how your farm is set up for you and your situation. I don't stop there I look at your farm's future, the family and the goals that you have. If it happens to involve me rearranging finance that is a bonus.

I want to help you achieve your business and personal goals and help you make things happen.

If you want an independent outside view of your business from a different perspective, give Ed a call on 07434 723443 or at edwarren@fcgagric.com

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