

Exceptional maize harvest buoyed by good varieties

- Outstanding yield and quality for most
- Autumn heatwave caught out some
- Analysis essential to balance rations

Recent weeks have given East Anglian maize growers one of their best harvests to date with above average yields and excellent starch and energy contents widely reported, says Lucy Smith-Reeve of Suffolk-based forage specialists Grainseed.

Whilst the 30°C September heatwave could have caused problems with late season drought, most growers who made the right variety choice for their conditions achieved freshweight yields of over 50t/ha (20t/acre) with good dry matters, she says.

“A lot of maize in the region went from 20% DM to 40%DM in around 10 days during September and whilst most livestock producers coped with this, some of the AD growers with larger areas struggled with rapidly maturing crops and the resulting reduc-

tion in harvesting opportunities.

“Varieties like Marco and Dulto, which are popular because of their established drought resistance, probably coped the best with this but other early finishers like Dominator and Ballade that maintain a mature cob on a green stem to extend the harvesting window, also proved their worth.”

Bigger cobs

Quality is promising too, Ms Smith-Reeve says, with many crops looking like they will achieve 35% plus starch contents.

“There was a bit of rain before flowering that helped with grain set, and whilst some growers were concerned about slightly shorter crops than usual, the actual cobs were bigger and this is key as it's where the real energy lies.”

But while of significant benefit



Above: Lessons can be learned from what has been a good harvest, says Lucy Smith-Reeve.

Below: Many crops look have a high starch content, as well as being high yielding

to livestock producers aiming to maximise milk and beef production from home-grown feeds, this high proportion of starch means getting the crop sampled early is essential this year.

“Rations with a large proportion of high energy maize need to be balanced carefully to avoid

complications with acidosis and the only way to achieve this is to know the precise analysis of your crop.

“Sampling early means you have time to make the right decisions about what feeds you should be using with your maize and not be forced into making rushed purchases halfway through the winter. Regular testing is also important so you can fine-tune rations as the clamp is used.”

Although generally a good year for maize production in the region, there are still lessons that can be learned, says Ms Smith-Reeve.

“Choosing varieties that suit your individual conditions is still key to reliable and consistent performance. Be realistic about the chance of drought, choose a slightly earlier maturing variety than you might usually and always wait until crops reach 30% dry matter before harvesting.

“Plus, if you're growing a large area, talk to a forage specialist about growing a range of varieties with different maturity dates to extend the harvesting window and avoid bottlenecks at this critical time of year.”

