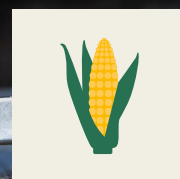


myKWS MAIZE

NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 26 | WINTER 2025-26



3 Focus on KWS GISO

Introducing the exciting new short-season variety

4 Farm Case Study

Maize Silage for dairy cattle – Woodhey Hall, Nantwich, Cheshire

6 Cover Crops and Under-sowing Maize

Advice on building resilient maize systems

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Welcome...

...to issue 26 of the myKWS quarterly newsletter, which is packed with advice and information to help you make the most of your maize crop.

For this winter, KWS expert Andrew Cook offers his perspective in the seasonal review and highlights our exciting new variety, KWS Giso. The case study farmer is Paul Robinson, a first-time KWS Portabello grower who has been very impressed with its performance.

Many readers will be familiar with Jon Myhill of the Maize Growers Association. He outlines the benefits of cover crops and maize under-sowing, suggesting that growers could choose a field for trialling the techniques this season.

DID YOU KNOW?

Maximising maize silage methane yield will enhance AD plant efficiency. Aim for a target DM of 33-35%, with starch at 32-35% and a lignin content below 4%.



Andrew Cook

SEASONAL REVIEW

ANDREW COOK, KWS UK

Following a largely trouble-free harvest, a sizeable acreage of cover and catch crops has been sown to make up for feed shortages going into the winter. They will be a welcome spring top-up where forage stocks are running low.

This trend has put the focus on 'short-season' varieties in the ultra-early and early categories. They have the potential to mature in as little as 130 days, given the right location and soil type. As always, attention to management detail is another key piece of the puzzle for producing a successful crop.

An increase in the national maize acreage has been widely predicted, and it should help to balance grass silage shortfalls, if we have a repeat of last year's growing conditions. The lack of rainfall certainly highlighted the benefits of maize as a 'clamp filler.' The rise in demand for maize seed is expected to come from a combination of regular growers increasing their maize acreage and new growers trying the crop for the first time. As always, it's best practice to order early to ensure you get the variety you require to suit your farm needs and delivered in good time for drilling.

Lessons learnt from the past season are focused on the importance of moisture conservation. It is crucial for good establishment, so it should be a priority during seedbed preparation and sowing. Another issue is selecting the right planting depth according to the soil profile, conditions on the day and sowing date. The benefits of completing harvest in good conditions and in good time cannot be underestimated.



FOCUS ON:

KWS GISO

FAO 160

NEW

Ultra Early EnergyBoost

KWS Giso is one of the most exciting new short-season maize varieties in the ultra-early sector, representing the best of the rapid genetic progress made by the KWS breeding team in recent years. A true multi-use, short-season hybrid, it is suitable for forage, AD, or grain, and is available via a range of merchants.

The variety offers early harvest potential to allow a generous sowing window for a following crop, as well as a tremendous yield average of 18.0t/ha DM, very high starch at 39.3% and 11.59 MJ/kg ME. KWS Giso has flown through National List trials after a strong performance and will be launched on the Descriptive List for 2027.

Flexibility has climbed the ranks of grower priorities, in line with ever-tightening financial margins. Therefore, KWS Giso may fit in well on farms where access to a range of end-uses gives the option for a last-minute policy change, in response to local markets and the weather. The variety is packed with positive attributes and has delivered superb rumen performance alongside excellent standing power scores.

A notable achievement for KWS Giso is its official acceptance in the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg) as a prospect for producing crimped grain, which is generally left to mature for slightly longer than maize for silage. These countries operate a cut-off date for maize harvesting, and KWS Giso has opened up new possibilities

for producers looking to grow a highly nutritious livestock feed with minimum environmental risk. The same potential applies in the UK.

KWS GISO FAO 160



	Average
Yield	18.0t/ha DM
Starch	39.3%
ME	11.59MJ/kg DM

FARM CASE STUDY

Maize Silage for Dairy Cattle

PAUL AND RUTH ROBINSON, THEIR SON MARK AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW JOCELYN – WOODHEY HALL, NANTWICH, CHESHIRE



Paul Robinson

Paul and his family run a progressive operation at Woodhey Hall, with the 960 'Woodhey' Holsteins averaging an impressive 12,000kgs at 4% butterfat and 3.3% protein from three daily milkings in the 64-point rapid-exit parlour. The business has a supply contract with Tesco and the fully-housed herd is calved all year round.

KWS Portabello was grown for the first time in 2025 and they will be putting in a repeat order for the coming season, says Paul Robinson. He was pleased with the results, which showed a 50 tonnes/ha fresh weight yield on the John Deere forager's harvest lab. Meanwhile, the farm has grown Cito KWS for the past five years and he describes the variety as "consistent and reliable." The maize crop is usually under-sown with grass.

"KWS Portabello demonstrated excellent maturity characteristics, the figures were very good (see table) and the silage is feeding out well. The variety seems to suit our land, which has a medium-to-heavy soil type

“

KWS Portabello fits our requirements for maximum yield and a relatively early harvest .”

and is only just within the boundary of a favourable maize-growing area."

The biggest challenge is harvesting on time and that means sowing as soon as conditions allow in the spring, he adds.

"The typical maize sowing date is 10 April, but the warm temperatures brought it forward by over a week in 2025," he says. "By contrast, poor weather in the previous season delayed drilling until the beginning of May."

"The usual pattern is to cut the crop in mid-October. Last year (2025) was very different as the season got off to an unusually early start. The Portabello and Cito were safely in the clamp by mid-September."

Some 500-acres of maize are grown annually on the 1,500-acre unit, with maize silage making up half of the forage element of the ration, explains Paul. He farms in partnership with his wife Ruth and their son and daughter-in-law Mark and Jocelyn, alongside a team of eight full-time staff.

The Robinsons handle most maize operations in-house, with the exception of drilling and spraying, and a pre-emergence and post-emergence herbicide policy is adopted. After desiccation, the under-sown grass is incorporated by ploughing or discing, followed by power harrowing and drilling to a depth of about 7.5cms at 43,000 seeds/acre.

"The seed rate is the result of various experiments in the past. It is a question of achieving a balance. A very thick crop will delay maturity and that is something to be avoided at all costs. If the plant stand is too thin, there will be a negative effect on yields. One of the priorities is making sure that the soil has enough friability to allow the drill to reach the required planting depth. Therefore, the discs are fitted with legs to alleviate compaction."

Fertiliser-wise, the crop receives slurry, plus a small quantity of nitrogen 'down the spout' and a foliar nitrogen spray mid-season. The organic application maintains the soil indices at a level where chemical phosphate and potash are unnecessary, he comments. Under-sowing maize with grass is considered a "no-brainer".

"The policy was introduced many years ago because of its benefits," he says. "As well as promoting a healthy soil structure, it adds nutrients and minimises the risk of run-off and possible environmental penalties. The under-sown crop absorbs excess water over winter and helps to break up the soil, promoting the fine seedbed that is vital for optimum maize performance."

"The advantages of under-sowing have been even greater since the launch of the Sustainable Farming

Incentive, because the support payment covers the input costs."

The grass is drilled in three rows between the young maize plants.

"The grass is drilled in June and there is normally only a short window to get the timing right. The maize must be above knee height to eliminate competition from the second crop."

The Robinsons have been growing maize since 1988.

"Maize is such an important element of maintaining milk production targets that if stocks are running short, the ration allowance will be cut down to eke it out until the new clamp can be opened. Portabello proved to be a good choice for the unit. It has earned its place in the rotation and we are hoping for a repeat performance in 2026," says Paul.

WOODHEY MAIZE SILAGE ANALYSIS 2025

Dry matter	34.3%
Protein	7.9%
D-value	76.2%
ME	12 MJ/kg
pH	3.6
Starch degradability	72.5%

WOODHEY HERD RATION

- **Maize + grass silage 50:50**
- **Straights mix (rolled wheat, soya hulls, sustainable soya, maize meal, rape meal);**
- **Protected fat**
- **Small quantity of concentrate fed in the parlour.**



AGRONOMIST PERSPECTIVE

Phil Champion of Agrovista was enthusiastic about the Robinsons' decision to opt for KWS Portabello. It was standing out from the crowd in on-farm trials at Woodhey in 2024, as well as on other local units across a range of soil types, he says.



Phil Champion

“

Maize is a big plant and it has to be fed correctly to keep it pushing on.”

"The family has been including ultra-early maize varieties from KWS for a number of years," says Phil. "We all agreed that it was worth taking advantage of some of the rapid genetic progress that has been made in maize, by sowing one of the newer varieties.

"Portabello looked very promising in Paul's trials. It showed a lot of potential for bumper yields and a timely harvest, so it made sense to scale it up and try it on a 30-hectare block designated for continuous maize. In other areas of the farm, a proportion of the crop will be followed by either a grass reseed or hybrid rye. There is good reason to grow an ultra-early variety, as it provides an opportunity for the early establishment of a following crop going into the winter."

He has some tips for maximising maize yields, pointing out that correct varietal choice, weed control and matching nutrition to crop demand are among the top priorities.

"It is worth spending time on getting the right variety choice for the situation and end use. This will pay dividends at harvest time. Keeping on top of weeds in the establishment period is also critical to success, as young maize plants are vulnerable to competition. The weather can sometimes make timeliness of application a challenge, so regular communication between grower, sprayer operator/contractor and agronomist is vital.

"Maize is a big plant and it has to be fed correctly to keep it pushing on. Historically, some farms have used the entire allocation of organic and chemical fertiliser in applications to the seedbed, or down the spout at sowing. Nevertheless, roughly 50% of its nitrogen demand occurs from July onwards. Our research has shown that the crop will benefit from a later season boost of MZ28, which is a 28% nitrogen, controlled-release foliar product. The response has been especially noticeable in dry seasons like 2025.

"I will often advise tissue testing sample plants at the 4-5 leaf stage, to pinpoint any nutrient deficiencies. It is quite common to find the maize short of manganese, magnesium and zinc. Leaf purpling will highlight a lack of phosphate, but that can also be linked to poor availability, as opposed to a shortage in the soil.

"Agrovista's Luxor PGA product is one example of a foliar treatment that can be used to correct any imbalances. It is a nutrient/biostimulant containing a range of trace elements and it can enhance the crop's ability to access nutrients, also promoting phosphorus availability."

COVER CROPS AND UNDERSOWING IN MAIZE:

Building Resilient Systems for Growers

JON MYHILL, TECHNICAL LEAD, MAIZE GROWERS ASSOCIATION (MGA)

Maize has become a cornerstone crop for many UK farms, valued for its forage quality and reliability. Yet its late harvest and the bare soil it leaves behind present challenges that cannot be ignored. Soil erosion, nitrate leaching, and structural damage after a wet autumn are all risks that undermine long-term productivity. Increasingly, growers are turning to cover crops and undersowing as practical solutions to these problems. These techniques are not just environmental box-ticking exercises—they are proven strategies that protect yield potential, improve soil health, and future-proof farming systems.

Cover crops have long been recognised for their ability to shield soil from the elements, but their benefits go far beyond surface protection. Living roots maintain soil structure, improve porosity, and reduce capping, which means better infiltration and fewer ruts when conditions turn wet. They also act as nutrient scavengers, capturing residual nitrogen after maize harvest and storing it in plant biomass over winter. This nitrogen is then released gradually in spring, reducing losses to watercourses and cutting the need for early fertiliser applications. For growers operating in sensitive catchments or under nitrate leaching glidepaths, these benefits align perfectly with compliance requirements and sustainability goals.

Undersowing takes these principles a step further by establishing a companion crop between maize rows during the growing season. The concept is simple: sow a grass or clover mix once the maize is tall enough to dominate but early enough for the understory to establish before canopy closure. Many UK growers aim for the four-to-six leaf stage for drilling. The result is immediate ground cover after harvest, reducing erosion and nutrient loss during the high-risk winter months. It also improves field access, as a living sward helps maintain surface integrity and reduces rutting. Importantly, when timed correctly, undersowing does not compromise maize yield.

“The key is to sow the companion crop after the maize is established, ensuring it supports soil and nutrient management without competing for light or water during peak growth.”

Species choice is critical for success. For undersowing, Italian or hybrid ryegrass remains the most popular option thanks to its rapid establishment and strong rooting. Tetraploid varieties offer extra vigour and palatability if grazing is part of the system. Light rates of clover can add nitrogen-fixing potential, though they should be used cautiously as they do increase the seed cost substantially. Festulolium is another option, combining resilience with decent establishment.



Jon Myhill



For post-harvest cover crops, cereal rye is hard to beat for nutrient scavenging and winter hardiness, while oats provide quick biomass and easier spring termination. Where time allows, vetch or crimson clover can boost soil structure and biological nitrogen, and species like phacelia or mustard deliver rapid rooting and canopy cover.

Timing and establishment are where many systems succeed or fail. Inter-row drilling at 1-2cm depth into moist soil is the most reliable method for undersowing. Avoid sowing too early, which risks competition, or too late, which limits establishment before canopy closure. Nutrition also matters: undersowing is not a substitute for feeding the maize crop. Adequate nitrogen ensures the main crop remains dominant. Row spacing and variety choice can also influence success, as wider rows make inter-row operations easier. Come spring, termination is straightforward for grass-based covers—a low-disturbance spray-off prior to drilling is common practice. Where covers persist as short-term leys, plan grazing and sward management to retain soil benefits without compromising the following crop.

Of course, challenges exist. Patchy establishment can occur in dry spells or under heavy shade, so drilling rather than broadcasting and timing ahead of rain are sensible precautions. Competition with maize is another concern, but later sowing and moderate seed rates help mitigate this. Slug pressure may increase under dense covers, requiring monitoring and cultural controls. Finally, the risk of a green bridge into spring can be managed through timely termination and careful species selection.

The economic and environmental upside of these practices is compelling. Better nitrogen capture reduces losses and can trim fertiliser bills. Improved soil bearing capacity lowers the cost of remedial cultivations after wet harvests. Demonstrating

nitrate reduction supports compliance and opens doors to emerging credit trading schemes. Above all, systems that keep roots in the ground longer build resilience against extreme weather, protecting both profitability and the environment.

For those considering a first step, start simple. Choose one field for a structured trial this season. Opt for a ryegrass undersow or a robust cereal rye cover after harvest, and record establishment, winter cover, and spring nitrogen adjustments. These observations will inform future decisions and help refine techniques year-on-year.

“The MGA is here to support members with guidance, case studies, and events showcasing best practice.”

Cover crops and undersowing are not fringe ideas—they are practical tools for modern maize systems. By integrating them thoughtfully, growers can protect soil, retain nutrients, and maintain productivity in the face of tightening regulations and changing weather patterns.

If growers would like to find out more about these topics and maize growing in general, the annual MGA conference is being held on the 4th & 5th February 2026, and tickets can be purchased online at www.maizegrowers.com/event-list.

DID YOU KNOW?

Maize silage is 50% more efficient in terms of livestock weight gain potential, compared with grazed autumn grass.

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