

smith's soapbox

by Guy Smith



Radar love

When it comes to gawping at the old internet on the iPhone, I'm definitely getting a rainfall radar-map problem.

It used to be just the UK but it's now starting to include the US mid-west. Sometimes I'm even found staring at coloured blobs floating over the Ukraine. Would you like to know the amount of rainfall in Bismark, North-Dakota

in May? Then I'm your man.

In case you hadn't guessed, it's not to do with some sort of unhealthy meteorological fixation. It's to do with an unhealthy wheat price fixation. History tells me it's in the May-June weather window that the wheat price can do exciting things. In 2007 it started a climb in May on the back of a mid-west and Ukrainian drought that didn't stop until the following year by which time the price had doubled.

2012 saw another late springtime rally. And, of course, just last year we started at £160 in May for it to hit £200 by August. Selling at the right time in the May to July period can make all the difference between a rich profit and a bitter loss in the farm accounts.

At the time of writing we are on another bull run on the back of

sticky mid-west weather, but I'm well aware that by the time you read this the clouds over Bismark may have parted and our American cousins will have got back out on the prairie to resume planting or the Black Sea boys may have yet to see any sign of their usual yield-destroying summer drought.

The ghoulish side of this obsession with global grain growing weather is that you get close to wishing bad luck on your fellow international farmers. OK let's be honest, I don't so much as 'get close' to wishing a bit of bad luck, I actually revel in the news some poor sod in Illinois has his maize drill stuck up to its axles and is unlikely to move before Thanksgiving. The deeper the water the happier I am.

And if there's news from the Ukraine that Farmer Vladimir is staring at a depressing dust storm in June then I start to skip round the room. If it's not so much as dancing on someone else's grave its only because I've two left feet when it comes to the cha-cha-cha. What's that you say, there's a chance of a golf-ball sized hail storm over the wheat fields of the Pas-de-Calais? Couldn't we add a biblical plague of locusts just for good measure?

Of course, as a son of the soil, I can share the pain of seeing

Guy Smith grows 500ha of combinable crops on the north east Essex coast, namely St. Osyth Marsh — officially the driest spot in the British Isles. Despite spurious claims from others that their farms are actually drier, he points out that his farm is in the Guinness Book of Records, whereas others aren't. End of.

@essexpeasant

grain fill start to evaporate in June. I'm not so far down the spectrum that I'm completely devoid of the power of empathy. Indeed if I'd heard someone else was taking some sort of pleasure from the news that north-east Essex was facing a grim harvest I'd struggle to be charitable about such nastiness from my opposite numbers.

The truth of the matter is if all the wheat farmers of the world could agree to suffer a 10% dent in our yields then we'd all be happy to jointly share the burden — made all the sweeter by the fact a 10% reduction in the global wheat harvest would probably result in a 20% price improvement thus leaving us all better off. But unfortunately, us farmers don't live in an equitable world so it's back to dog eat dog. Now where's that iPad? I need to check www.isitpissingdowninpueblo.com

Look at the size of those blobs — with any luck they're wreaking havoc on the harvest prospects of some poor farmer in Illinois.



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