



WITH GUY SMITH

Smith's SOAPBOX

United we stand

“As I write, there's chat on social media about arable farmers

refusing to load out milling wheat in April as some sort of protest. I'm not sure if it's an April Fool, but nonetheless it does catch the attention and maybe that's the whole point.

As a milling wheat grower it was easy for me to heed this strike call, not just because I was keen to show solidarity, but also because I'd already cleared the grain store before Christmas.

Usually I do have several

loads to market after Easter, but this year I was keen to see the 2024 cereal harvest moved early in case a certain fungal sclerotium reared its nasty purple head and was spotted at intake, meaning my milling wheat would then eat up road-miles and haulage charges in search of a colour sorter.

Mercifully and somewhat miraculously, I've somehow survived the season with only one rejection. I'm not sure whether this was due to a divine hand guiding the sampling spear, or whether my paranoia had exaggerated the problem in my mind in the first place.

It reminded me of the old adage – 'the harder you



The sight of a rather disgruntled looking barn owl sitting on top of one of our nesting boxes reminded me there's some spring cleaning to be done. We put eight of these pole boxes up more than 20 years ago and I'm pleased to say they've provided much required accommodation. At the current count, we've ringed well over 200 chicks since the millennium. However, it's time for a refresh as they're clearly in need of refurbishment if not replacement. Time to get the carpentry set out.

look, the more you find'. Four months on, just to add to my smugness, I'm conscious that my determination to get the 2024 harvest sold and moved early had proven a piece of marketing brilliance, as I caught market highs and avoided the later market lows. However it should be noted here, that like a lot of my self-acclaimed brilliance, it was actually a strike of pure luck.

But maybe my marketing smugness should come under review. Maybe a so-called 'milling wheat strike' will send the market into orbit as millers and bakers do everything in their financial power to prise open grain store doors. After all, as we know it only takes a 20% reduction in global wheat production to double its price. It was only three years ago in 2022 that milling wheat prices nearly doubled on the back of bad weather and a nasty war in Eastern Europe.

Which brings me to an idea that's been doing the rounds for many years now in rural pubs in eastern England –

that being, if farmers across the world could somehow limit wheat production then they'd have some control of the prices they receive.

It's not unknown in other commodities such as oil, where the oil-exporting nations try to control the price of crude through OPEC. It's a nice idea that smacks of a pipe dream. This current attempt by farmers to limit supply could be an interesting exercise in market control, but it'll only bear fruit if enough farmers get involved – and there's the rub. ●

YOUR CORRESPONDENT

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

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