Essex ‘desert’ changes tack to beat the drought

Dry conditions have created a virtual desert in one part of Essex. Edward Long finds out how one combineable crops farmer is responding.

CHANGES in the seasonal weather pattern and a severe lack of rain are forcing an Essex farm to change its strategy and tailor cropping to the new arid conditions. Between 1964 and 1982 the average annual rainfall measured at an official weather station at Lee Wick Farm, St Osyth, part of Wigboro Wick Farm, was just 513mm (20.2in). That was low enough for it to gain a listing in The Guinness Book of Records as the driest farm in the country.

“But since then we have had even less rainfall,” says Guy Smith, who, with brother Philip and father Andrew, farms 520ha (1300 acres) of combineable crops and potatoes on the coast near Clacton. “Last year we recorded just 12.3in, the lowest rainfall total for over 40 years and far worse than the 1976 drought year when 19in fell.

He’s a record breaker — but for all the wrong reasons. Guy Smith’s Essex farm is officially the driest in Britain, prompting key management changes. Where crop growth varies according to soil type precision farming could help (left).
Symposium menu

Regarding the menus for both lunch and dinner, ZSL has given much thought to their compatibility with the overall themes of the Symposium. The menus will be vegetation but with a fish option. All of the ingredients will be sustainably sourced. Please let me know if you would prefer a fish option for the symposium dinner.
WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLYERS GONE?

An eerie silence is descending on the British countryside. Unless modern agriculture changes its tune, songbirds could go the way of the dodo. By Richard Girling. Photograph by Tim MacPherson
CBC/BBS UK 1966–2004
Magpie

Index (2003 = 100)

Year

NFUnited
There's strength in members.
CBC/BBS England 1966–2004

Carrion Crow

Index (2003 = 100)

Year
Waterways Bird Survey 1992–2004
Greylag Goose

Index (2003 = 100)

Year

70 75 80 85 90 95 00 05

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 180 190

NFUnited
There’s strength in members.

NFU
CBC/BBS England 1966–2004

Pheasant

Index (2003 = 100)

Year

NFUnited
There’s strength in members.
CBC/BBS UK 1966–2004

Buzzard

Index (2003 = 100)

Year

NFUnited
There’s strength in members.
CBC/BBS UK 1966—2004

Chaffinch

Index (2003 = 100)

Year

NFUnited
There’s strength in members.