



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

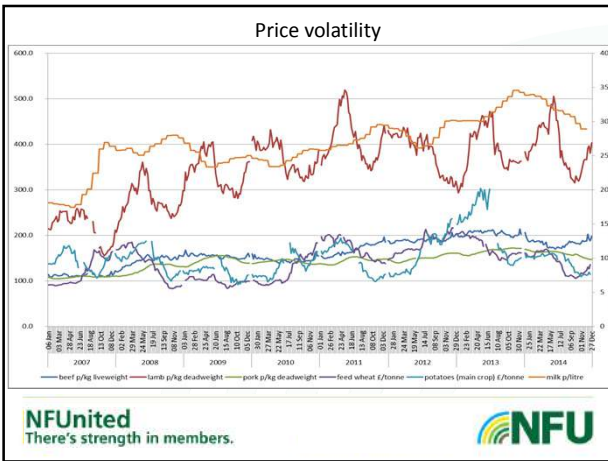
CHANGES in the seasonal weather pattern and a severe lack of rain are forcing an Essex farm to change its strategy and tailor cropping to the new arid conditions. Between 1964 and 1982 the average annual rainfall measured at an official weather station at Lee Wick Farm, St Osyth, part of Wigboro Wick 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, when we had 10in. Last



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).

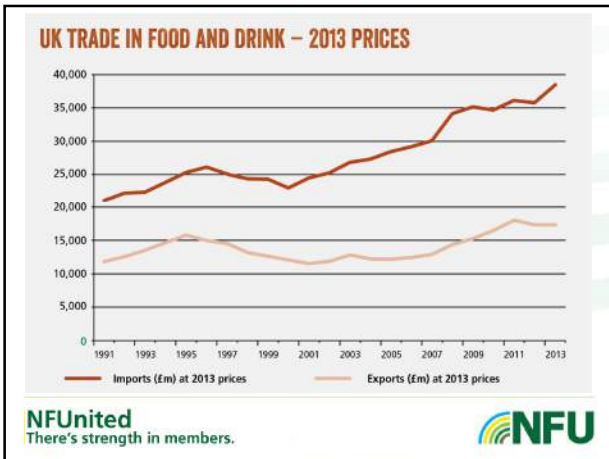














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