

# smith's soapbox

by Guy Smith



## I remember when...

**Rather disconcertingly I find I'm starting to use the opening line 'I remember when...' increasingly often as if I've become some sort of walking historical reference point.**

Such is my current longevity I now recollect an age when farming was distinctively different to the current one.

I've become a modern-day version of the old boys I grew up with as a little lad who could remember farming with horses.

By way of example — when discussing modern insecticide use with a local group of beekeepers the other day I made the point 'I can remember when dad used to spray the whole farm with DDT by aeroplane, and when I say the whole farm I mean the whole farm — the crops, the farmyard, the wife, the household pets, the kids. To this day I can vividly recollect that taste DDT used to leave at the back of the throat as the planes buzzed around our front lawn. I like to think the

exposure left no lasting effect on me. Others may beg to differ.'

Then there was an NFU meeting where some young gun was suggesting we should give up the use of pre-harvest glyphosate. 'I remember when...' came my evergreen opener '...dad first used glyphosate and it was to control couch in wheat crops by spraying pre-harvest. It's interesting that such is the efficacy of glyphosate that couch has almost become a forgotten weed that the under 40s have little knowledge of. The point is that, while it has been suppressed to the point of rarity it hasn't been made extinct. I was reading the other day of an organic farmer who was still scratching up couch rhizomes and burning them when breaking a field of five-year-old grass ley for a crop of spring wheat. You suspect after a few years without it then some of the farming millennials would realise too late why it's still needed pre-harvest.'

These signs of wistful

maturity made me wonder how in thirty years' time as a octogenarian I will look back on current farming. Will I be saying things like 'I remember the time when you actually used to drive tractors rather than just programme them' Or 'I remember the time before drones and satellites when the highest aerial view I got of the farm was from the top of the bale stack'. Or 'I remember when the only screen I used to study had Pan's People dancing to Kajagoogoo'.

*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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I came across an old cartoon from *Punch* the other day lampooning the Agricultural Marketing Bill then being promoted by the Minister of Agriculture in 1932. I noted the commentary underneath 'Under the Bill, home producers are to have their output controlled but foreigners may continue to send their produce here in unrestricted quantities.' 86 years on we find ourselves discussing the current Agriculture Bill with similar concern.

