



WITH GUY SMITH

Smith's SOAPBOX

The Spanish harvest of 2026

“It's said the reason us British are obsessed with the weather

is because it's unpredictable and in a state of constant change, hence it's in need of comment. If that's the case then the 'groundhog day' weather of the long hot summer of 2026 would merit little conversation. Day after sweltering day, the weather was much the same – it was as if the Sahara had moved 3000 miles north and settled over south and east England.

You'd suspect the easiness of this year's harvest might have caused a cultural revolution in the mindset of arable farmers. UK harvests are usually vexed 'snatched' affairs clouded by a sense of angst, where much of August can be spent sheltering in barns waiting for the rain to clear. Usually, once the sun eventually appears, teams of combine and trailer drivers scramble into action like squadrons of Second World War spitfire pilots ready to take on the Luftwaffe.



But not so in 2026, when 'bringing in the sheaves' was the most relaxed and leisurely affair I can remember. We even took weekends off in late July, smugly confident that on Monday morning the crop would be as dry and fit as when we left it on the Friday evening. There was no constant, anxious checking of the weather forecast, but rather a benign assumption that every day would be for combining.

Usually if we have a combine breakdown during harvest it's treated like a medical emergency – fitters are rushed to the ailing patient with parts in hand as if any delay could prove fatal. Not so during 2026, when if a shaft or a pulley did go awry, there was no sense of panic. Repairs could be done in their own sweet time.

Another re-evaluated issue was combine capacity – our old CX is getting to an age where I've wondered if our harvest demands might be too much for it. It's similar to me playing tennis – I'm good for the first set but after that some of the working parts start to wear badly. But this year, in terms of combine capacity, I think I'd have been comfortable if all we had to complete the harvest was dad's old Class Dominator with its 12-foot reel.

In my smug way, I could almost look on with disdain at neighbours with their state-of-the-art 100t/hr machines. There can be nothing worse than seeing £500k-worth of kit parked up in the shed by 1 August with nothing to do. But I suspect a return to a catchy harvest next year might wipe the smile off my face.

And so Harvest 2027

hoves into view and suddenly that blissful prolonged sunny harvest weather becomes a worrying drought that could curse the following year. Things will change if and when the rain returns, but at the moment we can't get the plough in and sub-soiling is off limits because of the indestructible boulders it would bring up.

I enclose a picture of the roadside headland of my neighbour's maize crop. What's remarkable is the stunted and shrivelled state of it underneath the chestnut trees while most looks remarkably healthy given its barely had 2" of rain since it was sown in April. It suggests the combination of trees and crops as promoted by the devotees of agro-

forestry might not be so syllogistically happy as some may suggest. On the other hand, the healthy state of the maize compared with my drought-afflicted spring wheat that was barely worth cutting, suggests it might be the crop of the future. ●

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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