

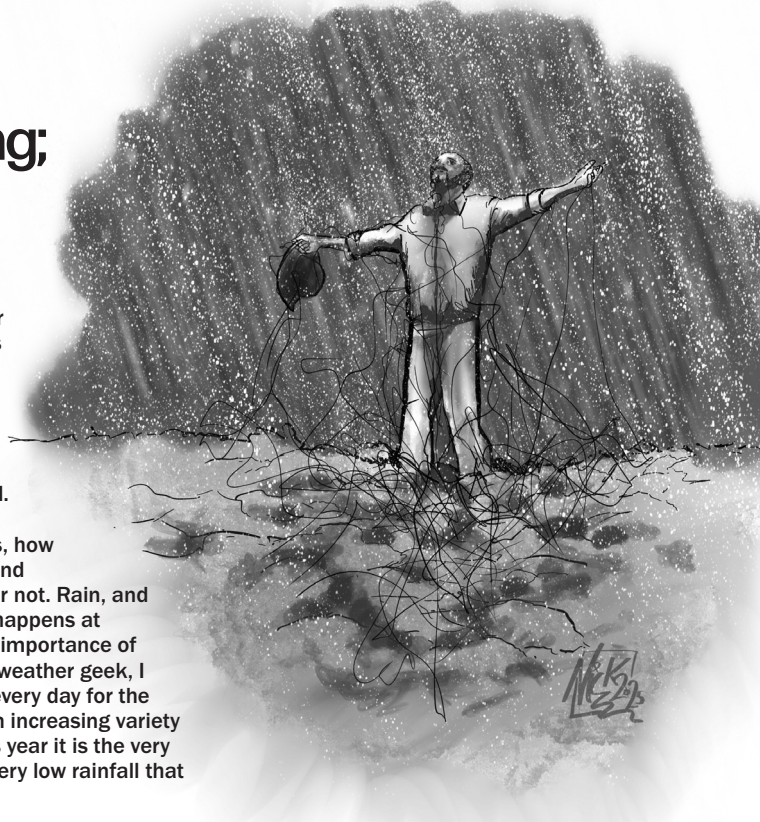
Sunnyside Smallholding; A nice sunny day?

When farming becomes your livelihood, the weather takes on a new significance. No longer is a sunny forecast just good for a BBQ or a rainy forecast, a cause for dismay. All types of weather can be welcomed or spurned. The weather dominates farming; when to plant crops, how they grow, when to harvest and whether the animals thrive or not. Rain, and the lack of it, controls what happens at Sunnyside. Conscious of the importance of rainfall, and being a bit of a weather geek, I have measured the rainfall every day for the last ten years. I have seen an increasing variety of weather extremes but this year it is the very high temperatures and the very low rainfall that is dominating our weather.

Lincolnshire is a relatively dry part of the UK and Sunnyside seems to be in a little dry, microclimate. I normally expect an average monthly rainfall of around 50mm in the first half of the year. This year, from 1st February to 30th June, I measured 96mm in total, close to one third of normal rainfall. This lack of rain combined with several heatwaves and record-breaking hot weather meant that by July, the ground was parched.

I don't worry about the lawns going brown, they will grow back but the sheep need good spring and summer grass to thrive. After a promising start, the soft-fruit (raspberries, blackcurrants and gooseberries) started shrivelling in the heat and many vegetables only survived because of my carefully rationed watering regime. Maintaining a wallow to help keep the pigs cool was an almost impossible challenge. The large natural pond is at an all-time low level for this time of year making the fish easy pickings for a visiting heron. I fear the fish may not survive any further drop in the water level leaving the heron with nothing to eat.

Everything looks tired, dusty and struggling to survive. Only the wasps seem to be enjoying the



weather, feasting on the shrivelled soft fruit that we have left on the bushes. We have had some rain in July but nowhere near enough to replenish the river and pond water levels and too late to help with many of this year's crops. Hay yields are down as are cereal crops, and it is likely that this will fuel the continued rise in food prices at the supermarket.

We hear lots of debate about climate change, about wind turbines, solar panels and electric cars. I can't add much to that debate except to describe the effects of extreme weather patterns that I see on my few acres. This year, I have been glued to the weather forecast, looking longingly at every black cloud in the sky and desperately hoping for rainfall. When I listen to TV weather presenters describing some potential rain as 'spoiling the lovely weather', I can't believe what I'm hearing! I am reminded that for many people, long periods of hot, dry weather are seen as holiday weather and an excuse to get the BBQ out.

Maybe it is time to start viewing things differently and celebrating any prospect of rain.