

Supermarket Produce

(Letter to The Sunday Times)

John Humphrys should not blame supermarkets alone for failing to support our farmers (Comment, last week). The real culprit is the current government which does nothing to promote an accurate picture of British agriculture, organic or conventional, to an uninformed British public.

How many buyers realise that the breeding sows in Denmark are tethered on slatted floors in sow stalls throughout their entire lives? This system was outlawed in the UK years ago, but the net effect is that Danish bacon is cheaper than home-produced. Do they also realise that beef from America and Australia is still crammed

with growth promoting hormones, a practice banned here 15 years ago? Do consumers seeking organically grown vegetables realise that about 75% of those on supermarket shelves are imported from third world countries such as Kenya, where checks on fertiliser and pesticide usage are non-existent? Also, that more pesticides are applied to crops in the supermarket warehouse store than in the entire crop production cycle?

Do they also know that in the UK our conventional livestock farming systems are the most welfare-friendly in the developed world, and that our farmers are subjected to more assurance checks (and bureaucracy) than any others?

Graham Smith, Former Head of Agriculture Cambridgeshire

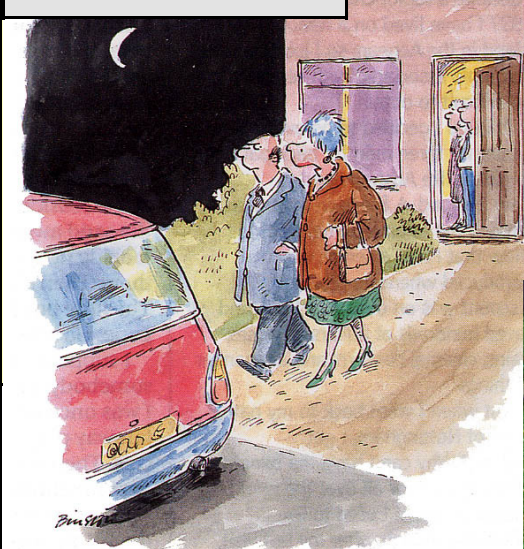
A Good Read

May I commend you to Bill Bryson's "A Short History of Nearly Everything". It is pure Bill Bryson, and although the basic subject matter is the history of the universe, everything it is written in his inimitable style. Even Liz (for whom physics never extended

beyond iron filings - and, indeed, rarely if ever got even that far) says it is quite funny. Let me offer you a quote.

"In France a chemist named Pilatre de Rozier tested the flammability of hydrogen by gulping a mouthful and blowing across an open flame, proving at a stroke that hydrogen is indeed explosively combustible and that eyebrows are not necessarily a

Not sure where this cartoon came from - I think it might be the Saga magazine - but I can't remember! That fits doesn't it?



That was very rude. When people who have invited you to dinner ask if you'd like to see their holiday photos, you shouldn't say "Not really"

Sunday Times January 19th 2003

Jeremy Clarkson

"....Needless to say, the stewardess kept apologising, but like holiday reps, waitresses in quasi-posh restaurants and

letters from utility companies, there was much misuse of the reflexive pronoun.

Fame at Last - Computing Which? November 2003

WORM IS BAD NEWS FOR FARMER

Terry Chisman's network of five computers was infected by the Opasoft worm last autumn. A retired computer programmer who now lives in a farming community, Terry hopes his experience will alert others to the dirty tricks of the virus writers.

'I was running McAfee anti-virus software before the infection, but I'd disabled the "on-access" scanner because I was using Cubase music mixing software, a program that can't stand being interrupted. That's why McAfee didn't intercept Opasoft on its way in. It picked it up at the next "on-demand" scan, but by then it was too late. Opasoft was all over the network.

'It took six months and over £1,000 to sort out. Lots of time and money went on professional help reformatting the computers' hard disks and reloading all programs. I also spent many hours on the internet looking for drivers for monitors, sounds cards and so on. Fortunately, all my data was backed up. I now use a separate computer just for the internet. I see farmers with their entire farm management system on a computer that's connected to the internet with no virus protection at all. It's a disaster waiting to happen.'



Best Logo of the Year Award

Seen on the back of one of these tankers that empties portable loo's:-

"We are Number One in Number Two's"



This incorrect use of "yourself" is even more annoying than the spread of Thames estuary

Revenge is Sweet

We acquired a little grey hen, but she is small, so she is at the bottom of the pecking order, and she gets picked on by everyone.

To our delight, however, she has hit upon her own way of getting her own back.

She perches above the feeder, and poos on everyone beneath.

Don't Waste Your Time

Pat was ironing my pyjamas. Again. So I did the sum.

If you spend 3 minutes each week ironing pyjamas, that's 2.5 hours a year. That is nearly 5 whole days over a 40 year working life.

So stop ironing pyjamas - take the 5 day holiday!

R.I.P. Beryl

Beryl, our oldest hen, was behaving a bit oddly. She didn't look well. But she was getting on a bit, so we put it down to her going through the henopause. Unfortunately, Liz let the chickens out a few days later and poor Beryl had fallen off her perch. She had finally popped off to that Elysian hen house in the sky. We were both quite upset, we had grown very attached to our Beryl, and we think that Liz will need some HRT - Hen Replacement

Christmas 2003

Warning!!

This issue is not funny. Again.

Well, the sheep story on page 3 is, but that's pretty much it.

If things don't start getting funny this year, I may just have to stop producing this, and you will all just have to look at my photographs!

The Third Wedding

Those of our readers who a) read last years newsletter and b) can remember any of it, will recall my mentioning that Vicki and Nash had to get married a third time this year. The blessing ceremony.

This took place in the Wirral on 26th April this year, and was another very lovely ceremony. It was however, very cold. And most of the photographs show this. Nevertheless, they are now well and truly married, and they are both the happier for it.

Unfortunately, the Volvo gave up the ghost two days before the ceremony (see Volvo Bites Dust on page 3) and we had to go from Derby to the Wirral (about a couple of hours) either in Liz's little two seater, (which she ruled out on the grounds that her outfit would have to be screwed up in the back), or in the farm Range Rover.

Result - I put the Range Rover though the local car wash (an entirely novel experience for it) and then spent what little was left of the Friday attacking it

with a vacuum cleaner. Liz couldn't do it because, of course, she was at the hairdressers! Anyway, I got most of the crud out, but the door linings were still covered in muddy boot prints, the dash was still covered in a thin dusting of indeterminate brown stuff, the inside of the windows was still so thick with gunk that you could barely see through them, and the "Keep Britain Farming" stickers were still in back. On the plus side, the seats had covers on, so I simply took them off, but it was still just a farm Range Rover. Just the thing to

turn up at your daughters wedding in.

And you don't drive it - it TRUNDLES everywhere.

Oh well, it got us there and back, if a little



The Knowle Farm

The Big Six Oh!

Yes this was the year. The big 60. I had a fantastic time though, and it all started on the Friday with a present from Dave and Carole - a day at Alton Towers. Just the white knuckle rides though - no girlie stuff. In the event we rode Nemesis 4 times, Air twice, Oblivion twice (including once immediately after lunch!), Corkscrew once (long queue and quite tame), and Submission once. We had a quick pie and chips for lunch, and that was all there was time for. A great day. Then seven of us had the first party up at the Tiger that evening.

Party number two was the next day - Saturday. This was a buffet lunch do for friends and

neighbours, and we had around 60 people here. The weather was perfect, which meant we could sit out on the lawn until late afternoon (at end of October!), and watch the children (of all ages!) on the bouncy castle. Julia made a fantastic cake of the duck pond complete with full upper pond (blue icing), and empty lower pond (solid chocolate!), and (I think) everyone had a great time. Thirteen of us sat down to a vast takeaway that night, and



that was party number two.

Party number three was on the Wednesday, which was my actual birthday, when we had a lovely pub dinner with Andy and Jo.

Then the final do on the next

(Continued on page 2)



Holiday Flat Up and Running

Our holiday flat is now up and running, and open for business. We have not had many people in yet because we have a tenant at the moment who has been here since August, and is likely to stay until February. Nevertheless, it has been well received by those who have stayed here. And so far we have enjoyed having them.

However, it is called Duck Pond

View and therein lies the problem. The duck pond, of which it purports to have a view is still little more than a hole in the ground. Well, two holes really.

My cousins started digging last year when they were up here, and gave us a good start, but we had to get a professional in to get the job finished in time.

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(Continued from page 1)

Saturday - a sit down meal for twenty. We had this at home, but had the sense to get a caterer in. Liz found being thrown out of her own kitchen a trifle strange, but the caterers did a fantastic job. As it was my birthday, the meal was, of course, very traditional - roast beef and Yorkshire pud, with bread-and-butter pudding to follow. There were other options of course, but not for me.

I wore my bargain Jaeger dinner suit - to the chagrin of most of the men who had vainly tried to arrive in various versions of my perennial blue check shirt and jeans.

(It was noticed that my niece (who looks after Vogue's web site and is clearly well aware of the way things are moving fashionwise) and my nephew bought me - a blue checked shirt. As I have been aware for some time, I am obviously now in the fashion vanguard - ahead of the game - so next year - you had all better try and get yourself a BCC (as they will be known before the year is out) before they all get snapped up!)

Vicki and Nash wrote a parody of "Warning" by Jenny Joseph - "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple" - but altered to fit me. I was deeply touched at how well the two of them know me, and deeply miffed that they

Holiday Flat

(Continued from page 1)

When he started, it was apparent that we would have to have two ponds, as the land sloped more than we had realised. He dug us two lovely ponds, called, with stunning originality, the upper and lower ponds, and we left them to fill up.

The top one filled up to a depth of about a foot, and there everything stopped. Back came the digger man.

He discovered, with the aid of some old photographs, that there had been a watering hole for the cattle right in the centre



were prepared to blurt it all out at my party. ("Chew my food slowly in pubs, and make farm smells"). It was very clever, and produced howls of laughter.

There were several other very funny readings, including a memorable one from Bryan, and I think it was probably the best birthday party I have had since my mother stopped doing them years ago when all the little 8 year olds had a sandwich and jelly fight.

I was overwhelmed by the many splendid presents, a worrying number of which were drinkable. I did get a couple of rather special presents - Liz bought me a half hour flight in a Jet Provost - a now retired RAF two seat trainer, which will enable me to take the controls of a jet aeroplane, and thereby cross

of what is now the lower pond, and that all the land drains in the area fed into it. This meant that all the drains passed right underneath the upper pond, and were clearly draining it.

So, he dug and he dug, and filled in all the drains he could find, and at that point the upper pond filled nicely. Liz and I had two or three lovely tea breaks this summer just sitting watching the wild life round the pond. And it has claimed it's first bootfull. Me, while removing weed.

However, the lower pond remained, and still remains, resolutely empty.

There is a page on the web site (www.DuckPondView.com)

another item off my must-do-before-you-pop-your-clogs list.

My brother and sister-in-law bought me a day racing Caterham Sevens at Silverstone - another adrenaline packed day out to come. (I do have to wonder - since Liz also recommended this one - whether she is trying to induce the final heart attack - but - hey - what a way to go!!!)

So, personally, I would wholeheartedly recommend being 60, but you must have the sense to do it early in the year and get your £200 Government Guinness (sorry heating) allowance. I am too late for this years and will have to wait until next. Shall I freeze to death this winter without my 80 odd pints of the black stuff? Watch this space.

Finally, thank you once again to

explaining this whole sorry saga, and the digger man is coming back again soon. More next year.

In the meantime, did you see that Holiday Program on the fifty things you must do before you die? The number 1 thing was



More mobile than you need?

Liz opened the washing machine to take out the washed clothes, and what fell out? Her mobile phone. Yes, it had gone through the complete delicates cycle, followed by a tumble dry. Good job it was delicates not boil wash. Anyway, it went into the airing cupboard for 48 hours to dry out and was then tested. It was all fine, and apart from the fact that we had to buy a new battery, and the internal battery that remembers the date and time has gone - it appeared to be none the worse for wear.

Then Liz did the old farmers trick of leaning over a lambing pen and having the phone slip out of your top pocket into a bucket of water. Again the airing cupboard trick seemed to fix it.

Then she tipped a glass of water into her handbag (don't ask - you probably wouldn't want to know) and it survived that.

Since this appears to have used up a large number of lives, it is now called the cat rather than the dog. (Dog and bone - rhyming

everyone involved for giving me such a splendid launch into my seriously sozzled sixties. For photos, try my web site

swimming with dolphins. Now, dolphins might be a bit tricky in our pond, but we thought for the 2004 season we might offer "Swimming with Sardines" or for the less adventurous, "Paddling with Pilchards". Let me know if you are interested.



This photo is genuine - no Photoshop trickery I promise!

The Tango'd Sheep Saga

This year for the first time we had to sell our one-and-a-bit year old ewes. (Since they have been sheared once, they are called shearlings, and the new lambs we bought are called theaves. Why? Who knows - that's just the way it is!).

Anyway, before you sell them you have to fancy them up a bit. Give them a haircut and a wash and blow dry. But you also have to dye them to give them a rather lovely golden browny sort of a colour. (Again why? Again - who knows - that's just the way it is!).

Andy had bought the dye, and we had to estimate the amount of water in the sheep dip. I did a long and complicated bit of mathematics involving areas of triangles, volumes of pyramids etc - Andy just looked at it and said "240 gallons". So that was that. We popped in about the right amount of the dye - and in went the first ewe. Half a minute later out she popped again - bright orange. And I mean ***bright*** orange.

We stood about a bit pondering this new wonder of nature, and Andy phoned a friend who's father did a lot of this. He heard his friend shout across the farm "Dad - Andy's Tango'd one of his sheep!". So - no help there.

Then I read the instructions on the dye. You are supposed to use it as an addition to a proper dip, which would have an ameliorating effect on the colour, but we had used it on it's own. The result - orange sheep.

We then went to the shop and tried to get some of the proper dip, but they only had a gallon. We put that in anyway, and put Mrs Tango though again. Result. Even brighter orange.

In the end we tried a few others (who were better), then gave up until we could get more of the main dip.

When we mixed it all up properly, of course, they all came out as they should. Two weeks later Mrs Tango had faded enough for her to go off to market with the others, but she still had orange roots.

Another useful lesson learned.

Volvo Bites the Dust

A sad day. My Volvo died.

It is a long story, and to keep it short, it had a cracked cylinder block. Pretty terminal that. It was on borrowed time really, I had only kept it going because I couldn't find anything I wanted to replace it with. (Big, rear wheel drive estate. Mercedes - terrible seats, both our bums went to sleep. BMW - it's a BMW. Vauxhall Omega - it's a Vauxhall.) So I kept the Volvo going.

But now I had to choose, so I got the Omega and - it's wonderful. All the toys you could want, including satellite navigation, and it justified itself completely on the way back from our holiday in France - see above.

We had driven some 330 miles north up the Autoroute, round Paris, and were in the hotel at dinner when we needed something that was in the rucksack. And the rucksack

Holiday 2003

We had a wonderful holiday in 2003. One we had long promised ourselves, and it all started a couple of years ago when we were on the Norfolk Broads with my cousin Janice and her husband Dave.

They had never been abroad, indeed, Jan didn't have a passport, and a first trip abroad at our age can be a bit daunting. So, since we have always enjoyed boating holidays with them, we said that we would take a cruiser up the river Charente in France.

Liz and I have always thought it one of the most beautiful rivers in France. It runs from the coast below La Rochelle up through Cognac, and Jarnac to

Angouleme. That journey is far too long and we did a shorter trip, but it did involve stopping in Cognac and a trip round the Hennessy distillery. Very good it was too (I think!).

We saw wildlife by the ton - more kingfishers than you could count - ten or twenty a day - so many in fact that we gave up counting. There were herons, all sorts of hawks and two coypu. Never seen one of those before.

We were given a briefing before we left, about what was where on the river, and as a result we spent a lot of time avoiding bits of the river which we had been warned were "no deep".

We managed to avoid them all, but eat and drank too much, and generally had a great time.



was.....in the restaurant where we had eaten lunch! To cut another long story short, Liz and I set off at 5am the next morning, back round the Paris Peripherique, and south to Tours. Picked up the rucksack, then back north again, round Paris again, pick up up Jan and Dave at the hotel, on north to Calais, over the channel, M20, M25, A127 to Southend, dropped Jan and Dave off, then finally north to Derby. All in the one day. 780 miles. And I got out of that car as fresh as I had got in it 15 hours earlier. Amazing.

The sat-nav system is a woman so, of course, she is Morticia (The Addams family for those of you who don't remember). Well, Morticia did us really proud round Paris (4 times in all). You get instructions like "Stay right 2 miles ahead", so when you get there you are in the right lane. Talk about stress free motoring. Paris Peripherique four times and not a trace of stress. That is ***good***.

The car is called Lurch because that is what it sometimes does when the cruise control is engaged. It gets a bit enthusiastic, and as the throttle

And she will put you outside, and get you home from, almost any house in almost any road in any town in this country. She