

News

Farmers face poor harvests after record dry spell

Ben Webster Environment Editor

The past ten months were the driest July to April for southern England since records began more than a century ago.

April was "exceptionally dry" with some parts of southern England and eastern Scotland receiving less than a fifth of average rainfall, according to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), which has records dating back to 1910. Farmers could face poor harvests and aquatic wildlife will suffer because of low river flows and dry soils this summer, it added.

Water companies said that the

ground was so hard that much of the rain in recent days and downpours forecast for today might not reach aquifers and reservoirs, some of which were much lower than normal.

The CEH said that "extensive water restrictions are unlikely this year", although there could be problems in some areas depending on rainfall in the coming months.

The report comes after the Environment Agency downplayed concerns of drought, saying that the country was not experiencing critically low supplies. Nevertheless, Affinity Water, based in southeast England, has issued advice to

customers about conserving water before the summer.

A spokesman for the industry body Water UK said: "Water companies are working with the Environment Agency, businesses and farmers to minimise any potential impacts to people and the environment should the dry weather continue."

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) is advising members how to use water wisely to prevent crops from being damaged by the dry weather. Paul Hammett, NFU water resources specialist, said: "Farmers can and do act early to improve their prospects of cop-

ing with prolonged dry periods by using water-saving devices like effective use of irrigation equipment, science-based soil and water management, and irrigation best practice."

Surface water flooding could affect some roads in London and East Anglia in the rush hour this evening, after the Met Office forecast up to 30mm of rain in a three-hour period.

A Met Office spokeswoman added: "Showery conditions are expected to continue into the start of next week for many before becoming more settled with fewer showers from mid-week." **Weather, page 57**

Gene-defect mother wins right to sue

Frances Gibb Legal Editor

A woman has won the right to sue doctors who failed to tell her that her father had a hereditary brain disease before she gave birth to her own child.

She discovered afterwards that she also had the gene for Huntington's disease. Her daughter, now seven, has a 50 per cent chance of having inherited the incurable degenerative disease.

The woman, in her 40s, maintains that she would never have given birth had she known about her father's condition. He did not want to tell her because he feared that she would kill herself or have an abortion.

In a landmark challenge, she will seek to sue her father's clinicians at three NHS trusts for negligence in failing to inform her. A judge in the lower courts had previously struck out her case, saying that the clinicians owed her no "reasonably arguable duty of care".

The case will involve judges redefining the confidential relationship between doctors and patients, after the Court of Appeal judgment.

The woman, who is protected by an anonymity order, has said previously: "I live every day knowing I'm gene positive. My young child also has a 50-50 chance of inheriting the disease and will have to live with this legacy. It will be her decision at 18 whether she wants to be tested but given the choice, I would never have inflicted this on her."

The woman's father displayed signs of aggression and, several years ago, shot and killed her mother. He had Huntington's disease diagnosed two years after being convicted of manslaughter. When doctors asked permission to tell his daughter, who was pregnant, about his diagnosis, he refused.

Social media spreads fear, says Charles

The Prince of Wales emphasised the need for "cultural connectivity" as he described how fears of difference were being "stoked and spread through social media".

The prince was speaking at the opening of the new building of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (Ocis), of which he has been patron since 1993. He called for calm reflection and open dialogue across faiths.

"There has perhaps never been a greater need for cultural connectivity," he said. "In the world in which we now live, with fears about 'the other' — whether that be Sunni, Shia, Jew, Christian, Yazidi, Hindu or Buddhist — stoked and spread through social media, and amplified by those who would seek to suppress understanding, rather than promote it, there is an urgent need for calm reflection and a genuinely sustained, empathetic and open dialogue across boundaries of faith, ethnicity and culture."

He added: "We need to rediscover and explore what unites rather than what divides us. And that involves a recognition that we have all learnt from each other and should continue to do so. No one culture contains the complete truth."

The Ocis, a recognised independent centre of Oxford University, promotes the academic study of Islam.



Looking sharp The Present is Just a Point will be among the works by the sculptor Nick Hornby at the Glyndebourne Festival, which features several art exhibitions

Police accused of perjury over 'machete and bomb' terror case

Fiona Hamilton Crime and Security Editor Duncan Gardham

A police worker in charge of an undercover terrorism investigation was accused yesterday of perjuring himself after it emerged that he met his team in secret while they were giving evidence in the case.

Simon Hussey, who ran the undercover team, was accused of holding meetings at a hotel in central London after the start of the Old Bailey trial of four men accused of plotting a machete and pipe-bomb attack.

The suspects, who called themselves the Three Musketeers, are accused of having a meat cleaver with the word "kafir" (infidel) etched into the blade. Weapons were found in their car by undercover police officers, the court has been told.

Mr Hussey's evidence was halted three weeks ago while forensic examiners went through his phone and that of three other members of his team. He

had told the court that he had not met or communicated with one of the officers, called "Vincent", while he was giving evidence.

The defence yesterday accused him of perjuring himself because Mr Hussey and his team had driven to London together from Birmingham, exchanged texts and had breakfast at their hotel.

The team of undercover officers had already held meetings to prepare for the trial at the Hilton motorway service station on the M6, the jury was told.

Mr Hussey told the court yesterday that they never spoke about the case while Vincent was giving evidence. He said: "I don't characterise [staying in the] same hotel as [a] meeting. We would have seen and acknowledged each other."

"I answered it at the time in total honesty on the basis I have not contacted Vincent in relation to this case. There's no hiding that we travelled together and stayed in the same hotel. We did not discuss the case."

Defence lawyers claim that the group



Khobaib Hussain, top left, Mohibur Rahman and Naweed Ali, left, claim undercover officers planted weapons found in their car

was framed by undercover officers who they say planted the weapons during a covert operation in Birmingham on August 26 last year.

The court heard yesterday that Vincent told Mr Hussey that he would put on an "Oscar performance" in the witness box. He wrote in a text message that other members of his team

thought that he was an "old school dinosaur" but said that he was not too old to "twirl" the suspects and "put them away for a long time".

In the deleted message from March 24, two days after the trial opened, Vincent wrote: "That was useful today... but once again it made me realise again... I wouldn't have wanted anyone else on the end of the phone. The situation we find ourselves in with [the British security service] is not ideal (understatement) either way I'm even more determined to put in an Oscar performance when I get in that box."

Steve Kamlash QC, for the defence, said that "twirling" meant "making it something that it isn't".

"That's what your boys did in this case; they spun these boys, these defendants," he said. Mr Hussey denied it.

Naweed Ali, 29, Khobaib Hussain, 25, and Mohibur Rahman, 32, are accused of plotting with Tahir Aziz, 38. All four deny preparing acts of terrorism.

The trial continues.