

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Newsletter no. 8 Harvest 2020



Harvest 2020

With thanks to all our reporters: David Moore, Joanne Jones, Colin Smallacombe, Danny Semorad and David Ursell.

As many of you will know, the cereal harvest has been difficult this year. It started last autumn when it didn't stop raining. Some farmers sowed some winter crops - but much of the seed and young plants rotted and yields are consequently poor. Others drilled in the spring - but then the weather became exceptionally dry and later warm - and again the seed suffered and yields are low. Now at harvest time the weather has been erratic with considerable rain, and David (Moore) reports that and in some areas in the west of England the harvest is only about half complete (as of 5th September - it would usually be complete around 10th September). Colin also says that harvesting the corn is very challenging at the moment with many farmers waiting for a settled spell of weather.

Joanne says wheat, barley and oats have struggled and there are some suggestions that yields have been 30-40% down which, as she says, will push prices up over the winter and shortages are expected. David (M) has heard of yields in some cases down to around one tonne per acre from a more normal three. And much of the corn has also needed considerable drying, so although the price has gone up, so have the input costs.

Danny said "The weather has been a real roller coaster this summer from near drought in the spring to what is looking like autumn already (writing in late August). Cereal crops had recovered well, but with the recent storms most of my oats are flat on the ground.

The rain in June came just in time to produce a reasonable crop of winter barley. After this morning's rain I'm not feeling very positive, however it usually sorts itself out. Hopefully by Harvest Festival time crops will be 'safely gathered in'."

David (Ursell) says "the harvest is better than expected although we had 80 mm of rain in August. Some spring barley has done quite well considering the conditions into which some of it was planted."

The maize is doing well - as it did last year - it loves the sun so the hot summer months were perfect for it, as long as it was drilled reasonably early in the season. As Joanne says maize has fared the best of the crops and yields should be good.

The silage wasn't looking too good earlier on in the year with the dry weather, but with the rain in August and the soil still warm David (M) says the grass has been growing strongly and the season has been extended - and though with the later cuts the quality is not so good it will still help with winter feed costs. Joanne concurs saying hopefully most will have enough silage to see them through the winter.

Sheep prices are doing relatively well and David (M) says prices for breeding sheep have risen particularly over the past few months. Beef has also recently picked up in price as well. As Colin says "Beef and sheep prices were low at the start of lockdown, but have recovered and lamb prices have held up when traditionally they would have eased at this time of the year." David (U) says "the lamb price has held up so far, though the future is uncertain with Brexit, but there is a high demand in France, so hopefully a fair price will hold up in 2021."



The other gift of sheep is of course wool, but Colin says wool prices have been at an all time low, and the price being paid doesn't cover the cost of shearing.

Focus on Farming

Harvest cont'd

Milk remains in the doldrums - there was over-supply during lockdown for those who supplied the coffee shops and catering industry - but David (M) says there is also surplus in Europe which is keeping prices depressed. Dairy farmers will also have rising feed coats because of the increase in corn prices and those who use straw for bedding will also face increased costs this year as there is again a shortage.

As well as impacts on supply lines, there were other Covid issues for farmers of course, not least an exacerbation of isolation and for some, difficulties of additional people accessing the countryside and land without knowledge of the Countryside Code, potentially putting farmers and their animals at risk.

David (U) says there are fears abounding about Covid 19 invading some processing plants, especially chicken. If some have to close this will cause a huge knock-on effect to producers. Where will the chickens be processed?

He concludes: "we are such a primary industry that it would take something more than a pandemic to stop all our activities of providing food for the nation. Don't forget we "ran out of food" in August (a reference to the level of our self sufficiency in food) in this country, so all farmers are important, look after them !!" We heartily agree David!

So, we have much to pray for: the continuing pressures of Covid, the uncertainty of Brexit affecting both tariffs and trade but also the basic farm payments scheme (see below) and of course the weather. But as always we have a harvest - and plenty to give thanks and praise to God and our farmers, farm workers, and all those involved in the production and delivery of our food and care of our land.

The Arthur Rank Centre have a "Thanking our Farmers" campaign this harvest-time, and you can access their resources here

<https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/church-life/harvest-2020/>



"Farming Now"

At our Devon Churches Rural Forum meeting in July, we were privileged to have Andy Butler who is the Devon County Advisor for the NFU with us (via Zoom of course) to talk about "Farming Now".

[You can read the full report of Andy's talk here, and access his slides and other resources.](#)

In summary, Andrew explained that the NFU is a trade association for farmers in England and Wales. It has 55, 000 members representing 46,000 businesses, three thousand of which are in Devon.

Covid Impacts - for the dairy industry in Devon, which mainly supplies the retail market, the Covid impact wasn't too severe. However, for farms in other areas supplying the coffee shops and hospitality industry, there was considerable over-supply during lock-down and a collapse in prices. For meat, restaurant trade sales were very low, with a concomitant rise in retail sales. However, retail sales are skewed towards mince and cheaper cuts, and restaurants to the more expensive cuts - so there was an imbalance and it's not possible to sell half an animal - hence all the "eat steak" campaigns of the early summer. There were some less obvious affects of Covid - for example the price of malting barley collapsed as less beer was brewed and the barley went for feed - good for the consumers, less so for the producers. You can see much more detail of each sector's price and profitability on Andy's slides.

The labour market is a concern for the whole UK and both agriculture and food service have been struggling since 2000. Covid has had an effect on labour movement and Brexit will do also. In Devon fewer vegetables are grown so there is less of a problem.

Focus on Farming

There was a discussion about an increase in the consumption of **locally sourced** food and the services of local shops during the Covid time. As well as helping local businesses, lower food miles is also a benefit and it is hoped this trend will continue. You can access a useful map of local food & drink suppliers within Dartmoor [here](#). As part of their Covid Recovery plan the NFU are exploring how to bring more information together on locally produced food available to buy locally.

The new Agriculture Bill going through parliament will be very important. It is the first domestic agricultural legislation for a generation so it needs to be right for both farmers and the public. The CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) has pros and cons. It didn't compensate farmers for the things they do for society as a whole, whereas the Agriculture Bill is focused on a theme of "Public Goods". It includes the **ELMs scheme (Environmental Land Management Scheme)** and you can see the full policy discussion document [here](#).

The big battle within the bill relates to animal welfare and food standards. There are concerns about British farmers having to compete with imports produced at lower standards than they are here. As Andy said, British farmers produce to very high welfare and safety standards, with labelling consumers can rely on. As a country we need to import food, but we need a level playing field. The NFU have a petition in support of making it a legal requirement that for any future trade deals food imports should be produced to the same standards in welfare and safety as the UK. The petition has achieved more than a million signatures. You can access it [here](#).

Future Trade: The NFU are working with the government on future trade deals. A Trade Bill now will set the tone for a generation and its terms will affect how people invest going forward and/or whether to go into or come back to farming, or leave the business. A no-deal Brexit would have a significant impact on farmers. Import tariff rates have been published and have been kept the same as before so there is some protection. However, if standard tariffs of 40% are applied to British lamb exports, for example, exporters would face a serious problem.

Net Zero: Farming currently contributes about 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, and this can be reduced further with various measures. The NFU has a target for farming to reach "net zero" by 2040. You can read more about this [here](#). The arguments regarding farming and the environment are complex. For example, much land used in the UK for rearing livestock is not suitable for other food production and the grassland sequesters considerable amounts of carbon and UK meat production results in fewer emissions than other parts of the world. Both what we eat and where it comes from are important factors.

Andrew concluded by saying that we can all help to support our farmers – looking out for the Red Tractor label, buying local, signing the petition and supporting campaigns and joining "[NFU Countryside](#)".



Farm Visits Programme

It won't be a surprise to you that our Farm Visit programme for 2021 had to be postponed. We hope to be able to re-arrange our visit to the Arla factory and Rhude Farm near Holsworthy in 2021.

The Countryside Code

Martin Beck, our Rural Crime Officer for Devon, would like us all, where possible, to publicise the Countryside Code to help reduce damage and crime in our rural areas. Materials, including a poster for downloading and display, can be accessed [here](#). Maybe Parish magazines and websites could also be used to publicise the code?

The police are also collaborating with [Clean Devon](#) and other agencies to reduce fly tipping in Devon. Fly tipping and additional litter have been a problem during lockdown.

Other news and events

Lightening the Load

Coming Soon from Growing the Rural Church - **“Lightening the Load: Freeing the church for Mission”**

With origins in our 2018 DCRF conference on Rural Ministry, Lightening the Load is a resource for rural churches to help move forward in the wake of coronavirus.

You can read the introductory paper **“A Theological Celebration of Rural Life, Mission and Ministry”** written by Rev’d Penny Body and The Ven Mark Butchers, with much input from our rural clergy and diocesan team [here](#)

Modern Slavery - The Farm Work Welfare App

A new app designed to help tackle labour exploitation and modern slavery in the farming, horticulture and food production sectors has been being launched by the Church of England’s modern slavery initiative.

Developed by The Clewer Initiative it provides information on employment rights in eight languages and is aimed at the thousands of workers who come every year to help with the harvest of fruit and vegetables on UK farms. Find out more [here](#).

The Arthur Rank Centre: Just in case you hadn’t caught up with it “Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre” has returned to its former name “The Arthur Rank Centre”. It still does all the marvellous things we know and love. In particular their “Together Apart” resource for rural churches in this time of Covid can be accessed [here](#).

Rural Worship Day 2020

Please note this event, planned for November 21st, has been moved into 2021.

Rural Ministries South West 2020 Conference

will be held via zoom on a date to be announced - you can keep up to date [here](#)

Thank you to Archdeacon Mark

Archdeacon Mark Butchers has chaired the Devon Churches Rural Forum since its inception in its current form in 2016 and we are really grateful to him for his wise leadership, encouragement and vision. With his deep understanding of rural life and ministry he has been a great blessing to our wider rural work in Devon during this time. As most of you will know Archdeacon Mark stepped aside from this role at the end of June, as he also said goodbye to Barnstaple Archdeaconry. He has now begun his new role as Principal of South West Ministries Training Course and we wish him well and look forward to continuing to work with him with a focus on training for rural ministry.

We are very grateful that Archdeacon Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes) has stepped in as interim chair of the DCRF. Douglas is active on the national Church of England Rural Affairs group we are very glad to have him as our current chair.

Devon Churches Rural Forum is an ecumenical group that meets three times a year to bring people with an interest in rural affairs and ministry together to discuss and respond in practical ways to issues relating to ministry and mission, training and resourcing for rural ministry, farming matters, pastoral care of our farming community, and various rural social, economic and environmental concerns.

Website: devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk Email: info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk

Chair: The Ven Douglas Dettmer Secretary and Editor: Rev’d Penny Body

If you have details of any events, book reviews, liturgies or good news stories to share please let us know so we can share via the website and newsletter – as always via info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk

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