

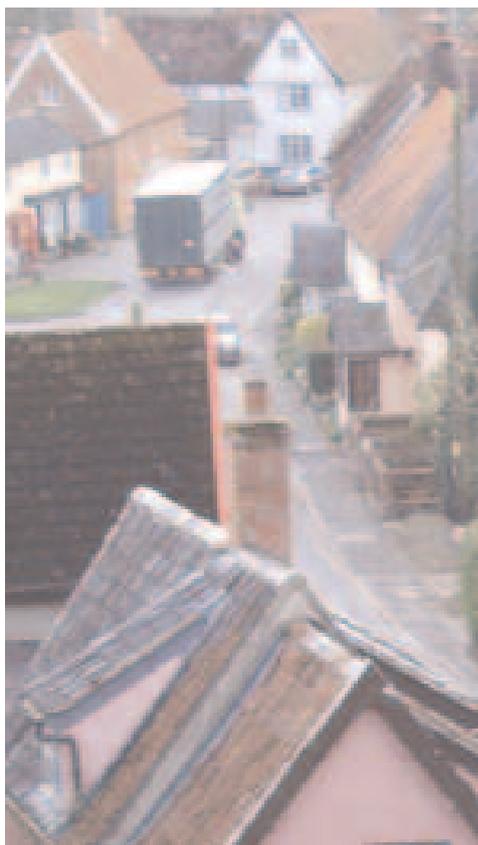
Rural Report

A monthly newsletter focusing on issues of rural life and farming of relevance to the work of the Church of England in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Information is drawn from organisations connected with the countryside (in its widest sense) within Suffolk and beyond.

The newsletter will produce brief reports giving factual information on a range of issues. Items may be of general interest or provide opportunity for prayer.

If more details are needed on any of the topics mentioned, please contact Brian Chester at bc@bcnewslink.com or call 01572 757600



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■ **The rains of August** will have caused more anguish among farmers who had still to complete what has been a dismal year for cereal crops. Yields of winter oil seed rape, wheat, barley and oats have all fallen short of the five-year average to a low not recorded since the early 1980s. However, national media reports of rising prices for bread were discounted by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board which says supermarkets will have more influence on what the consumer will pay than the price of wheat.

■ *“For an island nation, being able to feed our population is absolutely critical. Even as a global trading nation, shocks can expose fragilities in any reliance on imports. Imports will always play a crucial role in our food system but our own self-sufficiency must be paid more attention by government. It is stagnating. We sit now at only 64% self-sufficiency, having fallen from over 75% in the mid-1980s. We have the capacity to do much more. We cannot let our self-sufficiency slip further.”* NFU president Minette Batters calling on the government to ‘play a crucial role’ in stopping the slide.

■ **Wednesday September 9** has been named *Back British Farming Day*. It aims to give farmers an opportunity to promote a commitment to high production standards and build on the success of the NFU's food standards campaign which has gained over a million supporters.

<https://www.countrysideonline.co.uk/back-british-farming/>

■ **The British Veterinary Association** has published a comprehensive new policy listing 67 recommendations on how to improve the welfare of animals at slaughter to give them ‘a life worth living’ and a ‘humane death’.

<https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/news-article/vets-push-for-change-on-the-welfare-of-animals-at-slaughter/>

■ **LEAF** (Linking Environment And Farming) is running a two-day virtual Open Farm Sunday on September 19 and 20. <https://farmsunday.org/>

■ **A group of five rural** organisations representing a range of interests has written to Housing Minister Robert Jenrick telling him that proposed changes to existing planning laws will, without revision, risk a drastic reduction in the supply of affordable homes in rural communities. <https://rsnonline.org.uk/affordable-homes-at-risk-under-new-planning-consultation>

■ **An NFU booklet**, *Doing our bit for Net Zero*, shows case studies from across farms England and Wales, covering productivity, carbon storage and renewables and bioenergy. <https://www.nfonline.com/nfu-online/science-and-environment/climate-change/doing-our-bit-for-net-zero-130820>

■ **Suffolk Police** have warned that gangs taking part in illegal blood sports will ‘do all they can to get away’. September can be a starting point for hare coursing, says Sergeant Brian Calver, from the force’s rural crime team. “The numbers are fairly low to start with but as soon as we get a cooler period, a weekend of rain and the ground is softer, you do see a vast spike in it. It has got worse and their tactics also seem to get worse every year,” he said. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **The Soil Association** says that organic farming has proved its financial competitiveness per hectare across all farm types. Although business output is generally similar on both organic and non-organic farms, net farm income is often higher on organic farms. This is mainly explained by environmental support payments, with organic farms having higher average payments per farm and lower costs of production. <https://www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/farming-news/2020/may/15/comparing-organic-and-non-organic-farms/>

■ **NFU Mutual’s 2020 Rural Crime Report** has recorded its highest level of incidents for eight years. Rural theft is also expected to escalate as the economic impact of COVID-19 hits. Across the UK, rural crime cost £54.3 million in 2019, an increase of almost nine percent on the previous year. Sheep rustling rose by almost 15 percent year-on-year at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with a spike in reports of livestock – mainly sheep and lambs – being stolen in April.

This newsletter was initiated under the guidance of the Diocesan Rural Affairs Group set up as a means of identifying current rural issues and considering how the church should respond.