

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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Research at Newcastle University and University College, Dublin has shone a light on the importance of 'off-farm' income. The researchers estimate that even had we continued with EU membership, the number of viable farms across the four nations would be small - varying between 14% in Scotland and 29% in England. Now the progressive elimination of direct payments further reduces these shares to about 2% in Scotland and 15% in England, respectively. But off-farm income is unlikely to sustain non-viable farms indefinitely, says the report. Basic levels of profitability are necessary for their longer-term survival.

The NFU's latest Confidence Survey shows that 78% of farmers believe the withdrawal of basic payments will have a negative impact on their businesses. Defra has confirmed that direct payments under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) will be phased out in England over a seven-year transitional period from 2021 to 2027. In place of the BPS, farmers in England will be paid public money for work to enhance the environment.

Suffolk Police report that 80 incidents of hare coursing have been reported since September 2020 – down on the previous year. But the force is warning that strong action will be taken against those involved. Fines of up to £5,000 can be imposed.

Morrisons have announced a nine-year plan to work with its 3,000 farmers and growers to produce net zero carbon meat, poultry, fruit and vegetables. First in line will be eggs – expected to reach net zero by 2022.

'Many simple managerial changes can be performed on farms to help dung beetle populations thrive and recover, with many of these strategies having associated knock-on economic and environmental benefits for farmers. With the ongoing shift in agricultural subsidies towards public goods and environmental impact, now is the perfect time for farms to look into how they can implement strategies to benefit dung beetles and other key ecosystem species.'

Dr David Cutress, IBERS, Aberystwyth University for *Farming Connect*

A 'This Land is Our Land' event, planned for Saturday 24 April, which encourages people to walk on private land to mark the Kinder Scout trespass in 1932, has been criticised by farming organisations. Organisers, Extinction Rebellion, say that much of the land in England is 'misused', including deforestation, and moors and peatland being burned. The Country, Land and Business Association said it 'beggars belief' that the demonstration could affect farmers who have been working to feed the nation during the coronavirus pandemic. A spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion said the 'peaceful, non-confrontational action' was not targeting farmers. *Farmers Weekly*

Arable crops are now more vulnerable to weeds than before the advent of herbicides, according to a new study. Herbicide resistance, fertiliser, crop height and climate change mean weeds pose an unprecedented threat to food security, according to scientists at Rothamsted Research. Data from the world's longest-running experiment – the Rothamsted Broadbalk wheat trial – suggests while less than one-third of the harvest was lost to weeds during the 1960s this had risen to more than half during the period 2005-2014. Rothamsted Research scientist Jonathan Storkey said this was due to weeds doing better than crops in a warming climate, coupled with a shift towards shorter crop varieties that are shaded out by taller weeds.

Watch out for the stink bug - but do not touch! Native to China, Japan and Korea, brown marmorated stink bugs come in various shades of brown and grow up to 1.7 centimetres. With a shape similar to a shield beetle, they get their name from the foul smell they exude when they feel threatened – a smell that is hard to remove from hands! During the summer, they feed on fruit and vegetables sucking out the juice. A male was found on a pheromone trap in RSPB Rainham Marshes in Essex last year. They are fast breeders!

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.

