

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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Analysis of Census data by the County Council Network has shown that the number of over-65s living in country and rural areas has increased by a million over the past decade. The CCN has raised concerns that the demographic shift is putting pressure on underfunded adult social care services. County councils are also concerned that reforms to adult social care, due to be introduced from October 2023, could lead to reduced quality and access to services unless the government provides more funding and changes how it shares resources between councils.

Farmers are to receive a 50% advance on their basic payments as a cash-flow crisis faces many agricultural businesses. Soaring inflation and 'exceptionally dry' growing conditions are among pressures now being experienced. The Rural Payments Agency chief executive Paul Caldwell has said twice-yearly instalments will be brought in line with the regular payment system being introduced with the new Environment Land Management scheme. Basic payments are being phased out and are due to end by 2027.

"Unhappiness abounds in England because more than half of business owners feel it will be difficult to replace the Basic Payment Scheme as it withers away in the coming years, and one-quarter have not yet started preparing for life without it. The latter statistic is particularly alarming, but I suspect in some cases it is simply because they know they cannot replace it without drastically changing their way of life."

Andrew Meredith, Farmers Weekly editor

Figures from the Red Tractor 'Trust in Food Index' show that trust in UK food has slipped; four in ten shoppers also say they don't trust supermarkets, as they perceive that the quality of food they are buying is declining; consumers who switch to value ranges assume that production standards are weaker, despite many of these products being assured to high UK specifications; 43 per cent of consumers fear that UK standards will be undermined by changing regulations and trade deals.

This year's Suffolk Show attracted what is being reported as a record-breaking total of 97,218 visitors.

Farmland values in the East of England are outpacing the national average - even as the amount of land for sale in the region increases, studies suggest. Land agents Savills report that the value of all types of farmland in East Anglia reached an average of £8,641 an acre at the end of June - the highest figure for any region of the UK.

Six pre-harvest safety events organised by the National Farmers' Union across the region attracted around 700 farmers and farm workers. Workshops looked at powerlines, vehicle and driver regulations, power take-off safety and maintenance, safe stacking, and identifying risks around the farm. NFU regional policy manager Charles Hesketh said: "The industry is working hard to improve its poor safety record and it was encouraging to see so many members booking to come along, with their employees, ahead of the busiest time in the farming calendar for arable farmers."

A study by the Food Standards Agency has found that even when shoppers may intend to be environmentally sustainable, the contents of their baskets tell a different story. Affordability, taste and healthiness - rather than the environment - are what people prioritise. Those who believe fruit and vegetables, organic food, ethical foods and low carbon foods to be high cost, may turn away from sustainable food because it is seen as too difficult or too time-consuming to prepare.

The British Free Range Egg Producers Association is calling on supermarkets and egg buyers to ensure that the recent price rises in shops is reflected in the money paid to farmers. The association says that shoppers are paying 20p more for a dozen free range eggs, but farmers are only receiving an extra 4p.

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.