

# 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](mailto:bc@bcnewslink.com) or call 01572 757600



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■ **The Christian community** Lightwave is asking for prayers for farmers in the weekend of February 16 to 18. Good weather for crops; mental health of farmers and their families; finding farm workers and training up new farmers to take over; partners of farmers who are home-schooling, book-keepers, giving emotional support and so much more, are among suggested subjects.

Visit [www.lightwave.community/suffolk-in-prayer](http://www.lightwave.community/suffolk-in-prayer) and listen to Graham Miles, Lightwave Rural Chaplain talking about The Big Prayer Weekend for Farmers on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuNbl4gcbjs>

■ **A temporary** disease control zone running into Suffolk has been imposed following a case of bluetongue disease in Norfolk. It is a potentially fatal virus which affects ruminants including cattle, sheep, goats and deer. No vaccine is available. Bites from midges blown across the Channel are a possible cause.

■ **Farming organisations** are taking a new look at farm assurance schemes including the Red Tractor. NFU president Minette Batters said: "The world is very different to the way it was when farm assurance schemes started in the UK some 25 years ago. It's time for change. Farmers and growers feel that many schemes currently don't work for them. This review will go back to basics."

■ **Fly-tipping cases** have fallen slightly in the past 12 months but the number of incidents reported was still one of the highest on record, prompting the NFU to repeat its call for urgent action to tackle fly-tipping on farmland. The latest government fly-tipping statistics show the number of incidents local authorities dealt with in the year to March 2023 decreased by 1% to 1.08 million. But with more than one million incidents reported, the figures continue to form part of an overall upward trend over the past five years.

■ **Suffolk** produced Baron Bigod brie has been named the 2023-2024 best British cheese for the second year running in Fine Food Digest's Best Brands Survey. The cheese is from Fen Farm Dairy based at Bungay in the Waveney Valley run by Jonny and Dulcie Crickmore with milk from 300 Montbeliarde cows.

■ **The autumn** and winter rains have curbed the activities of hare coursers. Suffolk police report 19 incidents in the county since September 1, significantly down on previous years.

■ **NFU Mutual** has announced plans to create a Code for Countryside Roads 'to bring together expert knowledge and advice to make rural roads safer for everyone'. This follows a report that found fatalities on roads are back up to pre-pandemic levels with rural road deaths accounting for almost two thirds of all fatalities. Fatality rate on rural roads is one for every 31 accidents, against one for every 120 on urban roads.

■ **Farmers** are being encouraged to call in help for the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's Big Farmland Bird Count (February 2 to 18). In Suffolk, Andrew Goodall is helping about a dozen different farms, all part of the newly formed High Suffolk farm cluster, do the count. Patrick Barker, whose family farms 545ha of arable land on a Linking Environment and Farming demonstration farm in Suffolk, has been involved in the initiative since it started, recording three of his four farms. He said: "There is not always time for farmers to carry out the counts themselves, but this does not have to stop you from taking part."

■ **A nationwide** mental health campaign is due to be launched at livestock markets, agricultural colleges, and Young Farmers' clubs in February to promote respect and mental wellbeing in farming. The Big Farming Tea-Break campaign is being organised by *Farmers Weekly* 2023 farming champions Andy and Lynda Eadon, from Warwickshire, in collaboration with the Farm Safety Foundation. The week-long campaign will coincide with Mind Your Head Week, which takes place from February 12 to 16. Andy and Lynda's son Len Eadon took his own life two years ago and, since then, the couple have been campaigning to raise awareness of mental health in rural areas.

*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.*