

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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“Numerous sectors and businesses have made it crystal clear that they are facing the same labour crisis as us – the on going loss of non-UK workers and the inability to replace them, whether with UK or non-UK labour. Poultry is half the meat we eat in this country and demand for our quality British produce has rarely been higher. Yet the birds we are growing are 5% to 10% down since Easter simply because we do not have the people to process them.” British Poultry Council

The Government has promised new legislation to tackle hare coursing following lobbying from a coalition of rural organisations. The proposed laws will give the police and the courts greater power to tackle offenders in the field, remove the tools of their trade and impose stiffer penalties at conviction. They include increasing the maximum penalty available on conviction to an unlimited fine or up to six months’ imprisonment; a new criminal offence of ‘going equipped’ for hare coursing and new power for the police to be able to reclaim, on conviction, the costs of kennelling seized dogs.

“We need a movement, a movement with meaning, that tells the next generation that being a farmer, that being grower, can be great and immensely fulfilling even as it is hard as rocks, but also that the meaning it offers is embedded in the land, in nature and the very heart of the earth and we are there to care for it. That’s a precious responsibility.”

Organic farmer Alicia Miller writing for the Sustainable Food Trust.

<https://nlaf.uk/Library/content/GetDoc.axd?ctID=ZWWvNzBIY2QzZWJjNi00YWZiLWEIMTAzNWExOTFiMjJjOWU1&rID=MjYzMTg=&pID=MjI5&attchmnt=False&uSesDM=False&rldx=MTQ0MDc=&rCFU=>

The NFU is encouraging farmers to share the benefits of hedgerows via a short video or picture and caption. Hedgerows can store carbon above and below ground at an estimated 15 tonnes per hectare (tC/ha) as well as improving the organic matter of soil.

East Anglian farmers are bracing themselves for uncertain times ahead as the UK government serves up a trade agreement with Australia as an hors d’oeuvre for deals to come. NFU East director Gary Ford said farmers are worried about the effects of opening up the UK market (population 67m) to big-scale feed lots in Australia (population 25m) where 500 to 50,000 cattle are fattened up for a market which has a strong leaning towards exports (70%). These large-scale operations are said to make up 62% of its production. By contrast, the average beef herd in England is reportedly around 27 animals with just 4% of English beef farms keeping more than 100 head of cattle. Sheep are also raised on a large scale and to different standards. *East Anglian Daily Times*

Rural house prices in England and Wales are reported to be increasing at twice the rate of cities. A survey has shown a 14.2% a year rise in countryside locations against less than 7% in urban areas.

A new woodland creation grant is offering enhanced payment rates for planting the right tree in the right place. The grant will be administered by the Forestry Commission and funded through the Nature for Climate Fund. It will support woodland creation in areas as small as one hectare and can cover standard capital costs of woodland creation, including buying and planting the trees and maintaining them for ten years.

“The impact of arable farming on soil ecosystems has been likened to creating a ‘gangsters’ paradise’ by one of the authors of new research aimed at helping damaged soils recover. Based on a unique 50-year field experiment, the study shows that common farming practices such as ploughing, fertilising and adding pesticide to fields results in a chaotic new (microbial) world order where nitrogen stealing archaea (microorganisms) and killer fungi have muscled their way in at the expense of many plant beneficial fungi.”

Rothamsted Research

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.