

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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Weather woes and financial worries are eroding confidence among Suffolk and north Essex farmers - but the price of their land has held firm, reports the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Despite a challenging start to the growing season, falls in commodity prices and the phasing out of government support via the Basic Payment Scheme, farmland is retaining its value, according to regional land agents. Robert Fairey of Brown and Co said the end of BPS and the implementation of new farming subsidies meant farmers faced a period of significant change and uncertainty. "Those who can embrace sustainability, innovation and resilience are likely to thrive in this new environment, while others may struggle to navigate the challenges posed by extreme weather events and the transition to new subsidy schemes," he said.

One day...cereal growers could have a high-yielding wheat that needs only half the nitrogen fertiliser of current varieties. The claim comes from scientists in Japan who transferred this attribute from a grass that makes its own antibiotics and could also have implications for restoring soil health and improving water quality.

The Langley Abbey Estate, near Loddon, Norfolk, aims to create 600 acres of 'nationally significant landscape recovery and habitat creation' alongside the River Yare funded by selling credits to housebuilders and developers under new mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain rule.

"This funding recognises that farmers can't fight climate change or biodiversity decline on a shoestring budget decimated by inflation. Defra has under-spent its current budget for two years running, so the onus is now on making sure every penny is used to help deliver its world-leading Environment Land Management schemes (ELMs). Over the course of the next Parliament, the sector will need at least £4bn a year to deliver the sort of environmental outcomes the UK Government is seeking." Country Land and Business Association president Victoria Vyvyan commenting on a package of grant support worth £427m announced by the prime minister, with funding for technology and productivity schemes open for applications.

The prime minister also announced an annual UK-wide Food Security Index to capture data needed to monitor levels of food security; that a Farm to Fork Summit will be held each year, and the introduction of £15 million fund to help tackle food waste. "I hope all parties commit to hosting a domestic food security summit each year. Annual assessments will be critical to all of this," said NFU president Minette Batters.

Sainsbury's has become the third UK retailer to support home-grown produce by launching a dedicated Buy British section online. The announcement comes after rival retailers Morrisons and Aldi launched similar initiatives.

NFU Mutual reports that complacency among some dog owners and an inability to control their pets has led to farm animals worth an estimated £2.4m being severely injured or killed in dog attacks in 2023, up nearly 30% on the previous year.

"I fully expect one day to see savvy shoppers scanning their food in the supermarkets for nutrient density, making informed purchases for optimum nutrition for their family," Dan Kittridge of the Bionutrient Association in America who said that one carrot grown in optimum conditions had the same nutritional value as 200 carrots grown in poor soil.

Temporary Bluetongue control zones in Norfolk and parts of Suffolk have been lifted. A total of 120 cases of this viral disease - spread by biting midges and which affects all ruminants - were reported across 69 premises in three counties. Bluetongue does not affect human health or food safety.

National Farmers' Union Sugar has announced details of a project which aims to unlock funding opportunities for growers to be rewarded for environmental services and emission savings they are able to make on farm.

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.