

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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■ **East Anglia's farmers** are losing an average of around £5,100 a year as a result of rural crime, according to an NFU survey. Hare coursing, fly-tipping, burglary and theft are among the challenges the region's agricultural community faces - and the cost is mounting, says the NFU. Of the 252 farmers polled who were victims of crime in East Anglia in 2020, 10% said it had cost their business £10,000 or more. *EADT*

■ **An EU co-ordinated** survey of pesticide residues in foods has shown that of 96,302 samples analysed in 2019, just over 96.1% were 'within legally permitted limits'. The EUCP analysed samples randomly collected from 12 food products – apples, head cabbages, lettuce, peaches, spinach, strawberries, tomatoes, oat grain, barley grain, wine (red and white), cow's milk and pig fat.

■ **More than** 15,000 responses to its nation-wide survey on wellbeing in agriculture are being assessed by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Fund. The results will be used to improve support for rural people struggling with their mental health. Alicia Chivers, CEO of Rabi, said: "Our objective was to deliver statistically valid findings that encompass the diversity in farming today. We have more than achieved this. The results will provide a true reflection of the pressures and the impacts that people are facing, both from a personal and business perspective." Working in partnership with the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter, the findings of the *Big Farming Survey* will be published in the autumn.

■ **A Tractor Wheel of Life** has been created by a group of farmers to help meet the complexities of modern farming life. Harriet Housom, who led the project, said: "We started out by holding informal meetings in a local pub and what emerged was that everyone needed different things – the complexity was immense and it is only increasing. What was also clear was the mental element of feeling overwhelmed, so we created the *Tractor Wheel of Life* to consider the key questions which affect farmers' business and physical wellbeing. In this way we can break big complex issues into two-minute chunks so they're less overwhelming." The group is based in Cornwall.

■ **Church communities** and their visitors are being urged to join a week-long survey of the creatures and plants that inhabit their churchyards. Church land, which is often uncultivated or undeveloped for generations, is regarded by conservationists as a likely refuge for precious and endangered plants and other wildlife. The *Churches Count on Nature* survey is between 5 and 13 June – reports of animals, birds, insects, or fungi will be collated on the National Biodiversity Network. The organisers, the conservation charities Caring for God's Acre and A Rocha UK, and the Church of England and the Church in Wales, hope to create links with schools and wildlife groups. <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/expression-of-interest-in-churches-count-on-nature-2021/>

■ **A record** number of farmers took part in this year's *Big Farmland Bird Count*, leading to 81% more birds being counted over one million hectares of British farmland. The annual nationwide survey, organised by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, showed encouraging results. Despite much of the country being blanketed in snow during the survey period (5-21 February), 2,500 counts were returned. This represents a 65% increase in the number of counts submitted in 2020.

■ **A 'refreshed'** Countryside Code has been launched by Natural England. Visit: gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code

■ **April's unusual** run of frosty nights and dry days have slowed crop growth with early flowering oilseed rape being liable to frost damage. Grass growth will also be slow for animals turned out to pasture. Warmer nights and gentle showers are now high on the farmers' wish list.

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.

