

# 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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- **Maintaining** or increasing agricultural diversity is important for the future sustainability of farming systems and food security, says Dr Caroline Harkness reporting on a study by Rothamsted Research and the universities of Reading and Newcastle. Linked with a more precise approach to chemical application, the switch could improve the stability of food production and farm incomes - and have ecological and environmental benefits.
- **More than** 1,700 farmers took part in this year's Big Farmland Bird Count recording 149 species across 1.5 million acres – including 33 species from the red list for birds of conservation concern. The count also revealed that 62% of the farmers involved were members of agri-environment schemes. Suffolk recorded 93 returns; Norfolk 164.
- **Defra's UK** farmland bird index continues to show a decline in farmland bird populations with a fall of five percent between 2015 and 2020.
- **Suffolk farmers'** dried-up reservoirs are full again - after spring rains came to the rescue, reports the *East Anglian Daily Times*. However, optimism was tempered by challenging conditions for spring tasks - particularly on clay soils where water is slow to drain away.
- **Free range** egg labels have reappeared on supermarket shelves now avian influenza restrictions have been lifted. Some producers, however, fear the risk of the disease returning and will continue with 'barn reared'.
- **A farming family** based near Stowmarket has played a key part in a BBC follow-up to the series *Wild Isles*. The Barkers of Westhorpe grow arable crops on a large-scale commercial basis - but have also embraced nature on their 1300-acre farm. They have planted and restored hedgerows and ponds, created wildlife margins and turned less productive land over to wildlife meadows. Patrick Barker said that the film contains "real messages about what we can do and how our farming system should support the natural environment." *East Anglian Daily Times*
- **To read** a detailed account of the farm visit the Nature Friendly Farming website: <https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Lodge-Farm-case-study.pdf>
- **The NFU** has produced a series of field signs for farmers to display to 'keep everyone informed about our farming activity and help grow the understanding of rural life and encourage walkers to respect the land.' The signs cover growing wheat, growing barley, grazing sheep, grazing cattle, looking after the environment, growing oilseed rape, growing potatoes, growing sugar beet, growing oats, making hay and silage and growing brassicas.
- **Adverse weather** conditions have hit cauliflower growers across the country. Martin Tate, commercial director at Lincolnshire Field Products and chairman of the Brassica Growers Association, said that in the worst-hit regions, such as Lincolnshire, growers had lost as much as half of their crops.
- **Farmers** could soon add soyabbeans to their cropping list. Climate change is opening opportunities for the crop which thrives in warm conditions – and provides itself with the nutrient nitrogen, according to recent research by the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research.
- **The government's** neglect of the rural economy has resulted in a cost-of-living rural premium in the countryside, according to a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group. The report compiled evidence from more than 25 companies, charities, campaign groups and industry bodies, and found that, in rural communities, spending on everyday items such as fuel is 10-20% higher, despite wages being an average 7.5% lower than in urban areas. *Farmers Weekly*
- **A former** Defra Secretary George Eustice has called on the government to provide support for rare breeds (livestock) as a way to celebrate the King's Coronation year and recognise his 'passion for native breeds'. King Charles is a patron of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

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.