

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, contact brianrobertchester@gmail.com or call 01572 757600



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More rain and flood warnings across the UK (late April) put a stop to farmers' hopes of getting spring crops in the ground. An exceptionally wet winter has meant cereals and oilseed production in the UK could be down by more than a fifth this summer and is likely to lead to higher volumes of imports, especially for milling wheat. Production of wheat, barley, oats and oilseed rape is forecast to drop by 21% compared with the average for the past eight years, according to analysis from the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit. *Farmers Weekly*

"Things do not look too promising for this year. High rainfall in any month has been negatively associated with yield. My observation is that higher national average yields of wheat are typically associated with dry springs. Sunny weather over the next month or so will provide a stronger foundation for this year's crop. It needs it. Here's hoping!" Jim Orson, British Crop Production Council advisory board.

Floods and mud have made the 2023-24 sugar beet 'campaign' one of the longest in history. British Sugar confirmed that the last sugar beet was sliced at its Cantley factory on April 19 - bringing the total amount of time spent harvesting and processing the crop to 228 days. The company's four factories processed more than eight million tonnes of beet, producing 1.1 million tonnes of sugar.

William Hargreaves, who leads the rural agency team for Savills in the East of England (based at the firm's Ipswich office), says more farmers are selling up with the acreage of land 'on the market' across the region increasing by a third. Reasons are the offer of a lump sum as the farm subsidy Basic Payment Scheme is phased out (post-Brexit) over the next three years plus significant rises in costs and more weather and price volatility.

"While some are changing the way they run their farms, others are using the opportunity to leave the industry," he told the *East Anglian Daily Times*.

"The way we classify farm types and label pork isn't helpful for making informed decisions when it comes to buying more sustainable meat. Even more importantly, we aren't rewarding and incentivising the best-performing farmers. Instead of focusing on farm types or practices, we need to focus on meaningful outcomes for people, the planet and the pigs - and assess, and reward farms based on these."

Dr Harriet Bartlett, research associate at the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment - formerly at the University of Cambridge.

Discount retailer Lidl has introduced new contracts for pork producers that guarantee a margin for farmers above the cost of production. It will invest £500m through this new initiative and has reconfirmed its commitment to supplying 100% fresh British pork. The contracts will be based on an open-book model, providing producers with a fixed margin and a guarantee of minimum producer volumes. *Farmers Weekly*

Money raised from fly-tipping fines will be channelled back into local clean-up activities and enforcement under new rules announced by Defra. The NFU is urging local authorities to use funds to clear private, as well as public land.

"Cultured meat is a technology that seeks to change the world for the better, by making meat products with a much lower burden on the environment, our health, and animals, compared to conventional meat production. However, any intervention that may cause significant changes to our planet and societies requires thoughtful debate and consideration of how this might happen, what negative impacts there may be, and what uncertainties or ambiguities are being faced."

Neil Stephens, University of Birmingham and Alexandra Sexton, University of Sheffield.

East Suffolk Council has introduced new guidance on rural development to ensure schemes match the area's unique character and needs. The plan offers detailed guidance on a range of issues including annexes, barn conversions, equestrian development, tourism accommodation, small-scale renewable energy, and wastewater management.

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.