

# 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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■ **The RABI** has made additional support available to pig producers hit by financial loss and the build-up of stock on farms due to worker shortage at abattoirs. The charity's existing package of practical and financial support, and understanding the enormous emotional impacts of the crisis, has been widened by offering access to in-person professional counselling.

■ **Two leading** Suffolk pig producers are to leave the industry. Peter Mortimer, Fir Tree Farm, Metfield, who first kept pigs in 1964, is to send his 140-sow herd to slaughter as a result of an unfolding industry crisis which has left him losing £10-£15 for every animal he produces. It was, he said, 'a hard pill to take'. He is joined by Simon Watchorn, from Earsham Park Farm, Bungay. "There are a lot of people going out of business," he said. "I for one am packing up. I've been doing it for 27 years, this is probably the straw that broke the camel's back. That'll be 600 sows, selling 15,000 pigs just gone."

Source *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ "The unfolding crisis in the pig sector has provided an instructive case study on how not to manage any food system transition. Livestock farming will need to be reformed if we are to resolve the climate and nature crises. Throwing farmers and animals under a political bus is not the answer." Rob Percival, Soil Association

■ "We're calling on the government to provide details of how it will work with the British food and farming industry so that it can remain competitive following the announcement of the New Zealand trade deal. British farming businesses face higher costs of production than farmers in New Zealand and Australia. With margins already tight due to ongoing labour shortages and rising costs on farm, we're asking the government to explain how it is going to fund long-term investment in UK agriculture."

NFU president Minette Batters

■ **Ranjit Singh Boparan** – who owns chicken processor the 2 Sisters Food Group and the Bernard Matthews Food Group – has warned that 'rampant' inflation and lack of labour means consumers will face higher food prices. Mr Boparan is calling for 'honest pricing'. "We really have to start thinking differently about what our food priorities are and what they cost," he said. "How can it be right that a whole chicken costs less than a pint of beer? You're looking at a different world where the shopper pays more."

■ **A Suffolk farm manager** has been named 2021 'Farmer of the Year'. Edward Vipond, Troston Farms, Stanton, Bury St Edmunds, won the accolade at the annual *Farmers Weekly Awards*. He was praised for his 'huge commitment' to the 1,500ha arable operation, and 'consistent performance of crop yields' for the farm's wheat, barley, rye, beans, sunflowers and maize. Mr Vipond also won the *Farm Manager of the Year* category, which highlighted his success in an expanding business.

■ **Farming leaders** have called for post-Brexit reductions in farm subsidies to be postponed while growers battle 'severe disruptions' to food businesses. The National Farmers' Union wants an urgent review of Defra's future farming programme, including delaying the planned 2022 and 2023 reductions in the basic payment scheme. It says farmers are battling a 'perfect storm', with a shortage of European workers bringing some supply chains to a halt, while costs are increasing against a backdrop of disrupted trade flows and a retail price war.

■ "Levelling up funds need to be allocated where living standards and economic opportunities are lowest – regardless of whether these are in the North or South, in towns, cities, conurbations or countryside. If government economic and structural development funds were allocated on the basis of local real incomes, there would be a clearer line of sight from the levelling-up objective through to action on the ground. And more rural locations would benefit from a fairer distribution of national funds. Levelling up will be meaningless if rural housing needs are not also addressed. It's time for a rethink." Graham Biggs, Rural Services Network from the Planner website

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.

