

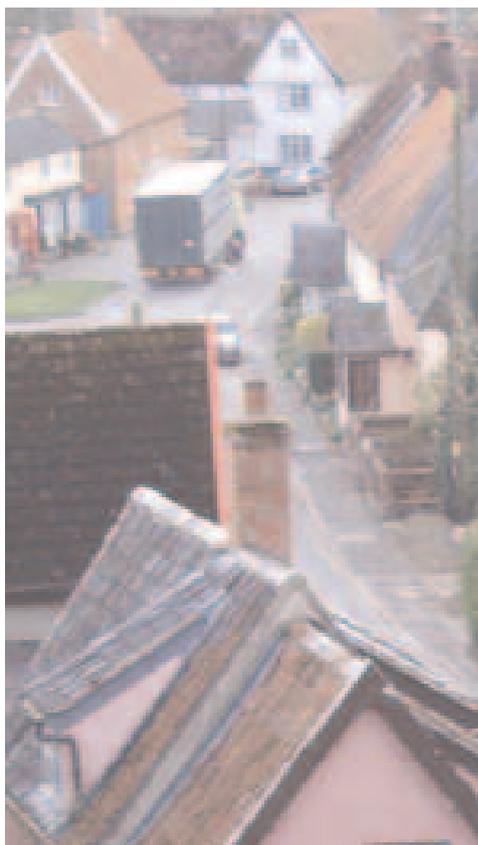
Rural Report

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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■ **Pig farmers** continue to be under severe pressure from blocks in the processing line, causing an ‘overloading’ of pigs on the farm, and the financial impact of rising feed prices. One estimate has put the backlog at more than 110,000 pigs leading to implications for welfare. Market prices remain below the cost of production.

■ **The Agriculture** and Horticulture Development Board estimates that pig production costs in the second quarter of this year reached a record 182p/kg. Pig prices also increased but remained 13p/kg lower than last year. This means producers were losing, on average, £24 per pig.

■ **And still more** about pigs – researchers say that a reduction in welfare from increased stress can be identified from a pig’s facial expression. Assessments can be made according to a ‘grimace scale’.

■ **The price paid** to farmers for sugar beet is due to rise by 33% next year but difficult growing conditions and the impact on yield of the disease ‘virus yellows’ have led to disillusion with the crop among growers.

■ **An NFU survey** has revealed that 84% of farmers and growers are interested in applying for Environmental Land Management schemes available through the government’s policy of ‘public money for public good’. A spokesperson said: “The survey underlines the key role British farming has to play in helping the country tackle climate change alongside producing climate-friendly, sustainable food.” The NFU has also called on the government to ensure that Britain’s level of food self-sufficiency does not fall below the current 60% and, in a just published report *British Food: Leading the way*, urges the government to undertake a comprehensive review of food security.

■ **An ‘impact assessment’** by Strutt and Parker suggests that net profits of the middle 50% of farmers could fall significantly as new government policies are introduced, even if income from Environmental Land Management payments are double those generated under existing agri-environment schemes. “This is why we believe farmers may be looking at ‘once-in-a-generation’ decisions about the future direction of their businesses,” says the company.

■ **Earlier this year** the government announced plans to ‘Level Up’ the country, by allocating funding to address geographic inequalities across the UK. However, new research by the Salvation Army warns that more than a third of England’s most deprived areas are at risk of missing out on funding and falling even further into poverty. The findings show that coastal and rural areas which feature some of the highest levels of deprivation are also the areas most likely to miss out on Levelling Up investment. <https://rsnonline.org.uk/third-of-most-deprived-areas-will-not-benefit-from-levelling-up-fund-research-finds>

■ **Food prices** will have to rise to cover higher wages for farm workers, industry leaders have warned. The warning came as a Lincolnshire-based field vegetable grower hit the headlines for offering £30/hour amid the post-Brexit labour shortage. TH Clements and Son, near Boston, advertised a post on social media for £240/day to pick broccoli - equivalent to a £62,000 salary. British Growers Association chief executive Jack Ward said the job advert showed how difficult recruitment had become since Brexit – and was a reflection of just how serious the situation was becoming on farms. *Farmers Guardian*

■ **The Depden** Care Farm, Depden, Suffolk is to use a £5,000 grant from the CLA Charitable Trust to complete a network of accessible all weather paths around the farm. The farm - run by the Millennium Farm Trust - provides young adults who have learning disabilities or brain injuries with the opportunity to acquire skills in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. Farm director Tim Freathy said: “The path network is a real game changer. It enables people to participate in farming life who otherwise wouldn’t because their mobility doesn’t allow them to.”

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.