

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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The UK pig industry has returned to a profit after ten successive quarters of losses. During this time, the industry incurred debts estimated to be in excess of £750 million. But AHDB figures show that in the second quarter of 2023, the average net margin was £22/head, up from a narrow loss of £1/head in the preceding quarter. During the second quarter of 2022, the average net margin was a loss of £52/head. *FarmingUK (2023)*

More than 110 MPs have signed an NFU open letter calling for supermarkets to back the nation's farmers by adding 'buy British' tabs to their websites. The filter, it is claimed, would direct shoppers to homegrown food to help boost the economy and cut the UK's carbon footprint. The chief executives of eight major supermarkets were sent a copy of the letter.

Owners of the Iken Hall Beef Shorthorn herd, Richard and Natasha Mann (winners of the native champion title and reserve overall supreme champion at this year's Suffolk Show), were top bidders for pedigree Beef Shorthorns at Skipton Auction Mart's annual production sale, paying 3,500 guineas for a cow and a calf from the Upsall herd near Thirsk.

East Anglian Daily Times

Troston farmer Shane Worger has twice been targeted by thieves taking pigs – early in August, 50 were taken during a night-time raid. Equipment was also stolen from the farmyard earlier this year.

Suffolk Police is reported to be stepping up patrols in the rural areas of the county with a focus on preventing criminal activity and responding to crime.

Almost one in ten British dairy farmers could stop producing milk by 2025 amid a growing financial 'crisis of confidence', warns an NFU survey. Low milk prices, volatile markets and the scale of on-farm investment are forcing dairy farmers to think seriously about their future. The survey, which covered nearly 600 dairy farmers, also revealed that a further 23 per cent said they were 'unsure' if their business would continue producing milk beyond 2025.

East Anglian Daily Times

The National Housing Federation has published research showing that the number of rural households on local authority waiting lists in England, increased by 31 per cent between 2019 and 2022, far exceeding the increase in predominantly urban areas of just three per cent. This increase in rural areas – a total of 46,318 additional households – comes as just 5,953 new homes for social rent were completed across England's rural communities between 2019 and 2022. Kate Henderson, the federation's chief executive, said: "These figures are a stark reminder of the particular challenges rural communities face in terms of access to truly affordable social housing."

More than 90 per cent of the British public is concerned about food prices, according to a report by *Public First*. At the same time, people know that the agricultural sector matters and there is widespread support both for UK farmers and a national policy of producing more food in Britain.

"For decades, British farmers have been sold the story that maximising output will make them more money. This has been proven not to be the case, with farmers now facing harsh economic conditions alongside unpredictable and extreme weather conditions. Meanwhile, intensive agricultural practices have been catastrophic for UK wildlife and there's a clear need to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We need a new approach which works for farmers, nature and climate. Our report offers a roadmap to a new farming system which addresses these challenges and secures a prosperous future for farmers."

Craig Bennett, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts, commenting on the report *Farming at the sweet spot – how farming with nature can make you happier, healthier and wealthier* published by the Trusts and the Nature Friendly Farming Network.

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.