

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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■ **Suffolk branch** chairman of the National Farmers' Union Andrew Blenkiron has warned that food price inflation could continue. "I hope that we have seen the majority of the massive inflationary input costs come through now - but it must be remembered that we didn't have the opportunity to pass them on last year," he told the *East Anglian Daily Times*. NFU regional director Zoe Leach added: "It's sadly no surprise that food inflation remains high."

■ **A suggestion** by environmentalist Ben Goldsmith that sheep 'are standing in the way of meaningful nature recovery' has been rebuffed by Suffolk farmers. Lady Caroline Cranbrook, told the *East Anglian Daily Times* that sheep had made wild landscapes more accessible to walkers. "They have been responsible for much of the appearance and biodiversity of the English landscape, including parkland and pastures in Suffolk," she said.

■ **According to** the Sustainable Food Trust, milk is among the 'most wasted' of our foods with an estimated 490 million pints a year being 'tipped down the sink' equating to the production of 200 dairy herds. One reason, says the Trust, is 'use by dates which people obey to the letter. In days gone by, a sniff would tell us all we needed to know.' Morrisons now plans to use 'best before'.

■ **The number** of pigs (762,000) processed by abattoirs in February was the lowest recorded monthly figure since May 2014, according to figures from the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

■ **A year-long study** by the Rural Services Network has revealed a that rise in rural rough sleeping since the pandemic has been worsened by the cost-of-living crisis. Rough sleeping in rural areas rose 24% in one year. High housing costs in prosperous areas is blamed for a 'hidden homelessness' crisis – with 'shame and stigma' meaning the most vulnerable are not recorded in official statistics, says the RSN. Visit: <https://www.nlaf.uk/Library/pl/ZWVhNzBIY2QtZWJjNi00YWZiLWEIMTAxNWExOTFiMijjOWU1LjI5NzA5>

■ **Collaboration** between Norwich Research Park and British Sugar aims to 'sustainably safeguard' the region's sugar beet crop from a disease known as Virus Yellow which can cause significant losses in yield.

■ **A 'landmark'** court case has indicated a higher level of penalties for hare coursing convictions. A court in Lincolnshire imposed fines and costs totalling £13,000 on two men convicted under new legislation which also allows for the seizure of dogs and equipment and a ban on the keeping of dogs.

■ **The Suffolk regional office** for the NFU is to close as part of a cost-cutting exercise within the organisation. The NFU - which is based in Stoneleigh in Warwickshire - has seven regional offices in England each employing around 15 staff; these will be reduced to four administrative regions under the restructuring plans.

■ **New figures** from the National Sheep Association reveal that incidents of sheep worrying are on the rise. The survey, completed by more than 300 association members, found that 70% had been victims of dog attacks with only 14% of farmers notified by the owners of the offending dogs. Many farmers also reported facing abuse, intimidation, refusal and general negativity when they approached dog owners to request dogs be put on leads.

■ *'The horticulture sector urgently needs a strategy that tackles the immediate problems, and a 10–20-year plan to build financial viability and environmental sustainability. Last year the Government Food Strategy promised that they would work with growers to develop 'a world leading horticulture strategy' but we have yet to see this. Since then, the issues have escalated.'*

Soil Association commenting on empty supermarket shelves.

■ **NFU reports** that Defra has announced its intention to impose a complete ban on the use of peat in commercial horticulture by 2030. There will be a period of exemptions for professional growers between 2026 and 2030.

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.