

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



Issue 125: August 2023

■ **A fall in artificial fertiliser** use on British farms in 2022 had little impact on crop yields, suggesting farmers could benefit from a permanent reduction in ammonium nitrate applications. That claim is made by the *Nature Friendly Farming Network*, which notes that the high cost of fertilisers due to the war in Ukraine – with prices averaging £766/t in 2022 – prompted a 20% fall in usage for five key arable crops. But yield data suggests this had little impact on crop output. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **Prices of prime farmland** across the East of England have reached a nine-year high, according to land agents Savills. Land sold in three months to the end of June averaged £10,758 an acre – 1.8% up on the previous quarter. This was higher than the national average of £10,242 an acre and 13.3% more than the same period last year.

■ **The NFU** is advising farmers to plan ahead for a change in the law that means they will need to provide photo identification before they can purchase ammonium nitrate fertiliser this autumn. A widening of the Control of Poisons and Explosives Precursors Regulations 2023 will affect sales of fertilisers with a nitrogen content of 16% or more from 1 October.

■ **The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board** has calculated that in the financial year ending April 2022 we spent an average of £62.20 per household per week on food. This is an increase of just under 50% since 2001. In comparison, total spend has only increased by 33%, so food is taking up more of shopper's expenditure.

■ *“Unpredictable soya prices and efforts to improve the livestock industry's environmental footprint are driving creative thinking in the science of animal feeds. There is currently a strong focus on the aquatic environment for breakthroughs. Of the many options available, algae and similar plant-like organisms seem to present a wealth of opportunity, with higher digestibility and solubility than commonly used feed options.”* Gary Hartley, *Farming Future Food*

■ **A Suffolk farmer** is calling for sky lanterns to be banned after raising concerns about their fire risk. Eddie Baker said dozens of the lanterns had landed 'all round the village' after being released following a funeral service. He said the lanterns posed a risk to thatched cottages and farm crops. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **The Department** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has launched a new consultation on the best way to protect hedgerows. As 'important ecological building blocks across our landscapes', hedgerows provide habitat, act as wildlife corridors, slow soil erosion and water run-off, support crop pollinators and sequester carbon. Farmers cannot remove important hedgerows and should avoid cutting or trimming during bird nesting and rearing season.

■ **Trials are underway** to discover if an extract from daffodil plants, called haemanthamine, could help to reduce methane levels produced by livestock. Researchers at Scotland's Rural College found that under laboratory conditions, using an artificial cow's stomach, emissions could potentially be reduced by 30% when this extract is added to their feed.

■ **A surge in egg imports** has been seen this year, as domestic egg production has fallen and retailers, processors and the food service sector struggle to meet demand. Imports of egg products during May increased by 10% compared with the same month last year, while imports of shell eggs almost doubled during the first five months of 2023, according to HMRC figures. UK production of egg products was down by 11% year on year during the first half of 2023. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **The UK wheat** tonnage will be down this harvest due to increased planting of barley and oilseed rape, according to the AHDB's latest planting and variety survey. The UK wheat area for harvest 2023 is 3% less than last year.

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.