

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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- Minister for Housing Felicity Buchan has promised more consultation over the protection of agricultural land in the national housing policy. The hope is that food security will be recognised alongside other imperatives.
- A *Farmers Weekly* survey has shown that lack of funding is the biggest obstacle to planting and maintaining hedgerows. Most farmers recognise the benefits to wildlife of the 'nature corridors' and want government 'public goods' payments to reflect this need. The Council for the Protection of Rural England is calling for a target of 40 per cent more hedgerows by 2050.
- Five students at the Suffolk Rural College have launched a campaign for more women farmers. They want to 'change attitudes' from those they experienced and plan to visit primary schools to reassure girls that there are opportunities in the farming industry. *East Anglian Daily Times*
- The *Telegraph* has reported that home owners using oil heating systems could face bills of £11,000 when, in 2026, government 'net zero' rules require replacement boilers to be heat pumps and not like-for-like.
- "I hope this meeting and the Prime Minister's commitment to ensuring Britain has a thriving food sector will mark a turning point in how our government values and prioritises the production of home-grown food, and demonstrates this government does back British farming." NFU president Minette Batters after meeting Rishi Sunak.
- New Year messages from farming organisations have called for 'top priority' for food security in 2023. Global pressures undermining the reliability of imports must be a warning to policy makers, they say.
- Paul Kelly of Kelly Turkeys has called on government officials to admit they have 'lost the war' to control avian influenza. Mr Kelly says that a vaccination programme is the only credible way forward.
- Graham Miles of the Lightwave rural and agricultural team says that anxiety among poultry producers has added to mental health challenges among farmers which were already severe - affecting family life and the pig and horticultural sectors. The Lightwave team is offering confidential support to those looking for help. Bishop Martin Seeley said: "The work that Graham and his team are doing is vital to support farmers in Suffolk and I am so grateful to them for their care and commitment." The Lightwave Rural and Agricultural Chaplaincy can be contacted on 07413 683368 or email graham.miles.lightwave@gmail.com
- No new cases of avian influenza were reported in East Anglia in the final week of 2022 – but outbreaks were confirmed in Yorkshire and Shropshire with a suspected case near North Thoresby, Lincolnshire on December 29.
- "This increase in visas is a positive step forward and will be a relief for many growers who are struggling to find the skilled workforce needed to continue producing the nation's fruit, vegetables and ornamentals. For some, this announcement will have come too late having made the difficult decision to reduce production in the coming season. Significant workforce shortages resulted in £60m of fruit and vegetables being wasted in the first half of 2022 alone. And we expect the coming 2023 season to be equally challenging." NFU deputy president Tom Bradshaw, who farms near Colchester, speaking to the *East Anglian Daily Times* after the government confirmed that 45,000 six-month visas will be available for seasonal workers this year.
- The UK female breeding pig herd has fallen by 14 per cent to 343,000 head, the lowest level for more than 20 years. Defra census data from June 1 show the total breeding herd, including boars and first-time gilts, fell year-on-year by 15 per cent to 426,000 pigs. The numbers of sows and gilts in pig were down by 12 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, which indicates the supply of fattening pigs will continue to shrink. UK cattle numbers totalled 9.6 million head in June 2022, an increase of 0.3 per cent on year-earlier levels. Total sheep and lamb numbers in the UK were back above 33 million in June 2022. This was an increase of 0.3 per cent (109,500 head) compared with June 2021. *Farmers Weekly*

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.