

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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■ **A government scheme** to encourage sustainable farming is to be opened to pig farmers next year. Previously, the scheme was only available to farmers who received funds under the Basic Payments Scheme which excluded many pig producers.

■ **Flooded land** damaging newly planted crops and restricting autumn cultivation were among the unwanted challenges to Suffolk farmers brought by the October storm. The NFU reported that, across the country, hundreds of acres of productive farmland was under water making the land inaccessible. Despite this, farmers (and their tractors) were among volunteers helping those caught in the floods. More rain predicted for November can only add to problems on farms - both arable and livestock, especially outdoor pigs.

■ **Over the border**, the Eastern Daily Press reports that a local council is planning to pay a farmer to stop keeping pigs. The aim is to reduce the amount of run-off from the land so a house building project can go ahead.

■ **In Lincolnshire**, the Rural Support Network has revealed a sharp rise in calls to its helpline. A total of 171 calls in the year to the end of March was a 90% increase on the previous year. The LRSN says that, while many were linked to money and debt, the biggest rise was related to stress and mental-health.

■ **East Anglia's** 'burgeoning' vineyards are at the forefront of a rapid expansion in the nation's wine industry - which has now made grapes one of our fastest-growing crop sectors. Figures show that grapes now represent 36pc of England's soft fruit crop, with strawberries and blackcurrants in second place at 21pc each. And that trajectory is reflected in East Anglia, which is building a rising reputation for producing some of the country's best wines. WineGB's regional membership in the east has grown from 50-60 members five years ago to 81 in 2023 - including 12 new plantations this year. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **Suffolk County Council** is, where possible, to source homegrown foods for all catering at council-organised events including meat and dairy options alongside plant-based produce. Councillors also plan to enhance partnerships with farmers and encourage Suffolk residents to shop locally.

■ **A Suffolk farmer**, Richard Peck, was winner of the Over 40s category of the Farmers Weekly *Britain's Fittest Farmer* annual event held at Great Dunmow.

■ **The Farmers Guardian** reports that, in September, retail inflation for eight of 11 food products tracked each month, was higher than the corresponding farm product, with cheddar cheese inflation remaining at almost 20 per cent when milk prices have fallen by 32 per cent. The only products where farmgate rises exceeded retail inflation were beef steak, lamb and eggs. Farm egg prices were 42.2 per cent more than the year before.

■ **A lack of transport** was cited as the biggest concern by 37 county-based charities working across England according to a survey by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). Health care provision, loneliness, isolation and the shortage of affordable housing were also on the list.

■ *"Food production will always matter and must be the most important output. But doing this with regard to protecting and enhancing all aspects of our natural capital should allow us to have quality food, sustainably sourced, from within an enhanced landscape."* CLA member Glenn Buckingham, farm manager at Helmingham Estate, Suffolk who sees value in working with the 'natural capital' of the estate. <https://www.cla.org.uk/cla-east-news/exploring-natural-capital/>

■ **The yellow mealworm** (*Tenebrio molitor*) could be a 'critical alternative protein source' to replace conventional soymeal feeds in the diets of a range of livestock, according to a wide-ranging study. The work, led by Prabhat Khanal at Nord University in Norway, analysed the nutritional profile, digestibility and microbiome of the beetle at all its life stages, when fed either a wheat or oat diet. *Farming Future Food (2023)*

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.