

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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“Defra has embraced many of the industry’s ideas for sustainable farming and food production in designing this new agricultural policy for England. Farming is changing and we look forward to working with Ministers and officials to co-create the schemes that will help farmers to improve productivity and animal welfare, encourage innovation and realise our ambition to produce increasingly climate-friendly food. However, the rate at which direct support reductions will take place, leaves English farmers with significant questions. These payments have been a lifeline for many especially when prices or growing conditions have been volatile and will be very difficult to replace in the first four years of this transition. Can Ministers be sure that new schemes will be available at scale to deliver redirected payments?”

NFU president Minette Batters responding to the publication of Defra’s agricultural transition roadmap – the *Path to Sustainable Farming*

“Pressure is building to make our food system in the UK more sustainable and transparent than ever. But with concerns over feeding a nation it is clear that a change in tactics is urgently needed to improve the balance between productivity and sustainability. In the UK meat industry one answer to improve this balance is to increase the number of local abattoirs in the supply chain.”

Angus D. Birditt, Sustainable Food Trust

The last-minute trade deal struck between EU and UK negotiators has been hailed as ‘positive news’ for East Anglia’s farming industry. Industry leaders have welcomed the Christmas Eve agreement but have called for more efforts to minimise anticipated disruption from new border checks, paperwork and trade requirements. *East Anglian Daily Times*.

Farm profits slipped by more than 20% in 2020 according to Defra. First forecast of Total Income from Farming for the year shows the twin effects to be reduced crop plantings and Covid-19.

The government has extended its Seasonal Workers Pilot scheme into 2021 easing fears of potential labour shortages on some farms. The NFU has acknowledged this as a significant step forward, but continues to stress that this expansion does not meet the total workforce requirements and plans to work with government to find future solutions. Despite the known challenges of recruiting domestic workers, the NFU will also continue its efforts to attract home-based workers with an enhanced *Pick for Britain* campaign.

Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty has warned that elderly people suffering from serious illnesses will be ‘left behind’ with no access to the NHS unless urgent action is taken. Professor Whitty called for the Government and health leaders to ‘get ahead of the looming health crisis’. While acknowledging that the pandemic is an ‘urgent priority’, he warned other diseases pose a major public health challenge, particularly for the elderly. He said there was an increasing concentration of older people living in semi-rural and coastal areas with poorer healthcare provision. *Daily Mail*

Avian influenza continues to spread with an outbreak confirmed on December 28 at a duck-rearing unit near Watton (Breckland). Gressingham Foods, the UK’s largest duck producer, has confirmed that a flock run by its supplier Green Label Poultry has been affected. Around 100,000 ducks will be culled at four linked farms. A spokesman for Suffolk-based Gressingham Foods said the latest cull was ‘heartbreaking’ for the farming teams and financially damaging for the business - but it would not affect customer supplies. *East Anglian Daily Times*

Uprooted! Police are investigating after thieves stole more than 300m of newly planted hedgerow from a field in Norfolk. Police said the plants were dug up by the roots alongside Aylsham Road between Aylsham and Buxton/Brampton on December 20. The hedgerow – a selection of mixed bushes and plants, complete with supports and plastic guards – was worth more than £5,000. *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.

