

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, contact brianrobertchester@gmail.com or call 01572 757600



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■ **First reports** of the cereals harvest show significant variations both within regions and farms. AHDB senior cereals and oilseeds analyst Helen Plant explains: "So far, oilseed rape and winter barley yields are encouraging, while early winter wheat yields are below average." Winter barley harvest was 92 percent complete by 23 July. Yields have been variable; reports on farm showing 29 percent down on the five-year average to 19 percent above. Oilseed rape yields have been encouraging, with more than half of the UK area harvested. Quality is good. Early winter wheat yields have been disappointing, though quality is reported to be good. Those on lighter soils have seen poorer yields, while heavier, moisture retentive soils, have fared better. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **The Suffolk-based** farm machinery company Claydon Drills is on the short list for 'Manufacturer of the Year' in this year's British Farming Awards.

■ **A total of 34 ewes** were reported dead with others injured in what is thought to be a dog attack on a farm at Stansfield, Sudbury. Of 160 sheep, only 104 are now left in the field. The sheep killed and injured were ewes which had given birth to twins. The farmer, Tom Biela, estimates the damage to his flock at more than £10,000. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ "Farmers face many pressures including producing more food sustainably, and using more natural ways of controlling pests. Planting wildflower margins can help; they can support pollinators and pests' natural enemies, sequester carbon, and brighten up the landscape." Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

■ **A production** trial run by Weetabix has halved the carbon footprint of wheat - its largest single ingredient. *FarmingUK (2025)*

■ **Red House Farm** at Charsfield - the village which featured in the 1974 film *Akenfield* - has adopted hand-crafted shepherd's huts as it diversifies into a 'quiet getaway style of tourism'. Farmer Ed Youngman joined with shepherd huts maker Matt Taylor to launch the venture. The Youngmans have been farming at Charsfield, in the Potsford Valley near Woodbridge, since 1887. Wildlife areas encourage nature and a local beekeeper has hives on the farm. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ "Climate change is sapping the nutrients from our food. Rising CO2 and higher temperatures are not only reshaping how crops grow but are degrading their nutritional value especially in leafy greens like kale and spinach. This shift could spell trouble for global health, particularly in communities already facing nutritional stress. Researchers warn that while crops may grow faster, they may also become less nourishing, with fewer minerals, proteins, and antioxidants raising concerns about obesity, weakened immunity, and chronic diseases." *Science Daily (2025)*

■ "Regenerative agriculture plays a vital role in improving soil health, enhancing biodiversity and ensuring the long-term sustainability of food production. However, many farmers face significant barriers, including financial risks, knowledge gaps and uncertainty about short-term economic returns during the transitions." *UK Agri-Tech Centre*

■ **The NFU** has submitted three key areas where reforms are needed under Defra's farm profitability review led by former NFU president Baroness Minette Batters. The NFU lists enhancing opportunities for investment; creating the right conditions to support business development and reforming market incentives and supply chain relationships and priorities. NFU president Tom Bradshaw said: "This review comes at a critical moment for the farming industry. It lands as farmers face a perfect storm and for many, it's become a battle to keep their businesses afloat. Confidence is at an all-time low, with deep uncertainty over investment and environmental schemes, climate pressures and resulting changes to our weather, increasingly volatile markets, and threats from changes to inheritance tax."

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.