

# 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](mailto:brianrobertchester@gmail.com) or call 01572 757600



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■ **Suffolk was drawn** into a regional avian influenza prevention zone in December as more outbreaks of the disease were reported in Norfolk. From midday on December 23 all bird keepers within the region were ordered to house their birds to protect them from the disease and attempt to control its spread.

■ **NFU Mutual has updated** its Code for Countryside Roads with new figures from the Department for Transport showing 70% more deaths on rural roads than urban highways, despite there being half the number of collisions. The code is a guide for motorists to help them use rural roads 'safely and respectfully'. Andrew Chalk, a rural road safety specialist for the insurer, said: "The golden rule is patience - you're not going to lose much time if you slow down."

■ **Farmers from Suffolk** and north Essex took their tractors down the A14 to Felixstowe docks on December 11 in a 'go slow' protest rally over recent Budget announcements. Suffolk farm chaplain Graham Miles, who joined the rally, said: "My concern - and the farmers I spoke to - is the future of their farms and the next generation that's coming along." He feared for the mental wellbeing of farmers. "I just don't know where to start with it because every farmer I talk to is so worried about it," he said. "There's so much pressure put on them." *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **Farmers across the UK** will stage a 'National Day of Unity' on January 25 to continue pressure on ministers to halt controversial inheritance tax changes. The National Farmers' Union said the goal is to thank the public for their 'overwhelming support' - and to warn politicians that farmers' campaigns will not stop until the 'badly thought-out' tax is 'finally subject to consultation and proper scrutiny'.

■ **For a detailed** and illuminating assessment of how the major UK retailers and food manufacturers are helping (or not) the move towards more healthy and sustainable diets, use the following link to access this year's *State of the Nation's Food Industry* report

<https://nlaf.us15.listmanage.com/track/click?u=eb10e2cb536aa8474452095af&id=78132771c2&e=6f1cfe49b5>

■ **Ultra-processed foods**, made by industrial processes and using additives you wouldn't find in a household kitchen, make up well over 50% of the average diet in the UK, says the Soil Association. A 'staggering' 67% of the daily energy intake of children under 14 is said to be made up of these foods. "Citizens in the UK consume more ultra-processed food, or UPF, than in any other European country. Ultra-processed foods are cheap and convenient. But an ever increasing body of science has linked excess consumption of these foods with ill health, including diseases such as heart, kidney and liver disease, diabetes, cancer, depression and even early death, says the SA. "Most of us would benefit from increasing our consumption of nutrient-rich, unprocessed, whole and minimally processed foods." Visit: <https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2024/we-can-improve-the-nation-s-dietary-health-by-making-minimally-processed-food-famous/>

■ **An annual Sentiment Survey** carried out by the *Farmers Weekly* has revealed that almost half of the farmers contacted felt either 'fairly pessimistic' or 'very pessimistic' about the next six months - a figure which rises to 56% for a two-year outlook. It is the first time since 2017 that the 'pessimists' have outweighed both the 'optimists' and the 'neutrals'. This downbeat view comes on top of 2024 when the numbers reporting a 'bad' or 'terrible' year grew from 31% to 37%. Differences were reported between industry groups - dairy farmers are quite positive about the next six months while arable farmers were the most downbeat - especially oilseed rape growers.

■ **The National Sheep Association** has launched a facility on its website which it says will help sheep producers meet an increasing demand from arable farmers seeking to introduce sheep into arable rotations.

*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.*