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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■**Ann Osborn**, chief executive officer of the Rural Coffee Caravan for more than 20 years, is to retire at the end of May. She joined the charity shortly after it was founded in 2003 by the Revd Canon Sally Fogden, helping to shape its early model of village visits, recruiting its first volunteers and building partnerships with local authorities and community groups. "I should have retired at 65, but I couldn't give it up because it's been my passion for all those years, but it's time for someone else now." *East Anglian Daily Times*

■**New research** covering trends from 2025 show the organic market has doubled in value over the last decade reaching £3.9 billion. Data from the latest Organic Market Report shows that 83% of households are buying organic and shoppers are 'seeking to back British farmers' with strong growth in organic milk, eggs and carrots all predominantly produced in the UK.

■**At 27, Will Pratt** is one of the youngest directors in the history of the Hadleigh Show. Will also becomes the third generation of his family to take on the role following his father and his brother Oliver. This year's show is on May 16.

■**A new law** will come into effect in April giving police more powers to tackle dog attacks on farm animals. Police can now take advantage of technological and scientific advancements when investigating incidents of livestock worrying, Andrew Blenkiron, Suffolk NFU member and managing director of Elveden Farms told the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Officers also have new powers of entry and to seize and detain dogs. "NFU has been lobbying for this change in legislation since 2019. I appreciate that most dog owners behave responsibly but sadly we are still seeing incidents of dogs out of control and attacks all too regularly," he said.

■**Woodbridge-based** Melton Renewable Energy has warned that its five biomass generation plants - including Eye power station – could close unless the Government continues with a support scheme due to end in 2027. The company produces energy from chicken litter.

■**Plans by** OPDE UK Limited to build a 39-hectare solar farm at Valley Farm, south of Hessett, Bury St Edmunds, have been approved by Mid Suffolk Council's planning committee. Made up of 75,000 solar panels, the site will produce enough electricity to power 9,660 homes. The north Suffolk solar farm (near Eye) has increased from 1,500 acres to 2,100 acres,

■**Conservation** conscious farmers from across the country have joined together to form an Environmental Group. It's first target is to measure the Government's goals of reversing biodiversity decline, improving water quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

■**Dennington Hall** Farms, Suffolk describes itself as "a family-run farm where regeneration and sustainability meet innovative farming techniques," guided by manager Ryan McCormack. Community engagement is one of the core values of the business which hosted a free village barbecue at the end of August, supplying its own Red Poll burgers for 140 people. This is now set to become an annual event. Last year saw the launch of boxed beef sales from the farm's herd of Red Poll cattle. There are now 300 customers on the mailing list. *Farmers Weekly*

■**Labour shortages** are leading to more milk producers turning to automated milking systems to reduce the long and often anti-social hours associated with milking twice or three times a day. *Alison Clark, SAS Consulting*. The UK milk sector is also experiencing significant pressure from global milk supplies and commodity markets, which have led to a sharp fall in milk prices.

■"*We are facing a planetary emergency in relation to our present food and farming systems. We do not have any more time to spend months or possibly years deliberating about how best to use our diminishing agricultural land area. We need to switch with immediate effect to farming and food systems that work in harmony with nature, reduce emissions, reinstate in-field biodiversity and nourish our population.*"
Patrick Holden, CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust

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.