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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■**Suffolk farmers** Peter and Richard Maddever of Scotts Farm, Cavendish, on the Suffolk-Essex border, started harvesting winter barley on 25 June – their earliest ever start and four days earlier than the previous family record set in 2022. The grain, destined for export through Ipswich Docks, has come in at exceptionally low moisture content after months of hot, dry weather. "We've had anything from 12% to 14% moisture. I couldn't believe that," Richard Maddever said. A lack of rainfall has accelerated crop maturity, although barley yields from the first lighter land have been slightly below expectations. *Farmers Weekly*

■**Country churches** are being encouraged to hold a Rural Mission Sunday to '*Thank the unsung stars*' who help to faithfully hold rural communities together. The Arthur Rank Centre suggests that: 'Whether your congregation is small, traditional, pioneering, or somewhere in between, this year's focus is designed to help discover new local possibilities and connect deeply with your wider community. You may choose to celebrate this on July 12 or a more suitable date for your church settings.'

■**The UK is becoming** increasingly dependent on food imports, as UK producers lose market share to global competitors, according to a new report by the Food and Drink Federation. Food and drink imports into the UK during the first quarter of 2026 increased by 2.6% in value to reach £16.3bn; exports declined by roughly 5% in value to £5.7bn.

■'**The ambition** of Defra's long-term Farming Roadmap is welcome, but for many farmers the immediate challenge is staying profitable. High costs, low returns and increasingly volatile weather continue to put huge pressure on farm businesses. Without profitable farm businesses, the government's ambitions for food production and nature recovery simply will not be achieved.' Country Landowners and Business Association's response to a farming profitability review by former NFU president Baroness Minette Batters.
NFU president Tom Bradshaw said it was 'good to see that the government has picked up many of the recommendations which were reflected in the NFU's submission.' The NFU would continue to work with the government to deliver on them. Questions have been raised on how the roadmap with be implemented and the scale of investment needed.

■**Bruce Kerr of Woodbridge** is the new chairman of the Suffolk branch of the Country Land and Business Association. Mr Kerr was director of the Suffolk Show during the pandemic years and beyond.

■**Just for the record**: Jeremy Clarkson's famous 'Lamborghini' tractor sold for £70,500 at an East Anglia machine auction featured in the latest episode of Amazon Prime's *Clarkson's Farm*.

■**Sunny skies** helped to increase attendance at the Suffolk Show lifting the total by nearly 3,500 to 86,322 against last year's 82,828. The show recorded more young people with a family package including *'under15s get to go free'*.
The event also attracted record sponsors.

■**Researchers who tracked** honey bees in the wild using a drone-based system found that each bee follows its own highly consistent flight path. Some repeated their routes so precisely that they deviated by only centimetres from previous flights. Landmarks like trees helped keep them on track, while uniform crop areas led to more variation. *Science Daily (2026)*

■**Slurry is one** of the most valuable fertilisers on farm, but only if it's managed correctly. Its biggest strength is also its biggest challenge: it varies massively, both between farms and even between individual loads. Understanding that variability and how it interacts with crop needs and soil conditions is key to getting the most from every application.
Allaster Dallas, The Farm Consultancy Group (2026)

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.