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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■**The wildfire** on Dunwich Heath which hit the national headlines, forced the evacuation of holiday makers and residents while inflicting wide-scale damage on the environment and wildlife, was still 'under watch' as *Rural Report* was issued. The fire, which covered 150 hectares, is likely to remain a risk for several days. It was tackled by 120 firefighters with up to 20 engines. Their work and that of other support groups has gained all-round praise. Russell Clement, general manager for the National Trust on the Suffolk coast, said: "The fire has torn through the entire National Trust reserve and the landscape that we know and love is now unrecognisable. Many wildlife species will have been impacted."

■**In his column** for *The Sun*, Jeremy Clarkson said making money from growing food has become 'quite simply impossible' and the situation is only likely to deteriorate. "Action is needed now," he wrote. "This year, I have 200 acres on my farm where we grew nothing at all. We knew that if we planted it with wheat or barley, we would definitely make a loss." *Farmers Guardian*

■**Suffolk was officially** declared 'in drought' in July along with six areas in central, eastern and southern England. Helen Wakeham, director of water at the Environment Agency and chair of the National Drought Group, said: "The hot and dry weather means we are currently using water faster than nature can replenish it. We want everyone to stay safe and hydrated during the hot weather but every drop we can save is a drop more for nature and agriculture."

■**National Farmers Union** deputy president Paul Tompkins called for immediate practical steps by the government and water supply companies. He said: "This means creating a risk register for vulnerable farm businesses, improving local communications, being adaptable as possible with abstraction so farmers can access water when it rains and unlocking the investment and planning changes needed to build more reservoirs."

■**Food is one** of 13 Critical National Infrastructures which, if disrupted, could severely affect essential services, national security or the functioning of the state. A report by the National Audit Office, due out this summer, will examine whether Defra is taking effective action to ensure that the UK food supply chain, and domestic food production, is resilient. *Savills*

■**Research** by the University of Exeter has found that, in every age group, women in farming reported lower mental wellbeing than the national population; 36 per cent of respondents reported low wellbeing, just four per cent were classed as high.

■**Babergh District Council** brought forward the seasonal cutting of its wildflower meadow in a bid to reduce fire risk, following a major field fire in East Bergholt covering 80 hectares of cut straw, trees, and hedgerows.

■**Increased uncertainty** in the agricultural sector has encouraged landowners and farmers to take a shorter-term view of agreements in 2025 according to the latest annual survey by the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers.

■**A Glemsford** homeowner, Ms Loretta Edwards, issued a plea after a Chinese lantern landed metres away from her thatched roof. The lanterns use flammable material to inflate a thin fabric balloon. "I know it had probably extinguished itself by the time it landed, but it's still a risk. I do understand that these are often lit as memorials but please think before you do so," she said. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■**Suffolk Coastal** MP Jenny Riddell-Carpenter has been appointed parliamentary under-secretary of state at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Her role will include rural issues and nature which fits with her work for Suffolk Coastal and in parliament during the last two years.

■**British Sugar** is to close its beet procession plant at Cantley, Norfolk (the UK's oldest sugar beet processing plant, opened in 1912) in February next year. Production will be switched to its remaining factories in Bury St Edmunds, Newark and Wissington.

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.