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 cause** of Suffolk's largest ever wildfire remains a mystery. The Dunwich Heath blaze, which broke out on July 29 and began on land within the Minsmere nature reserve, destroyed 370 acres of heathland and woodland. A spokesman for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service said: "Following a detailed investigation into the Dunwich Heath wildfire, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has concluded that the cause of the fire cannot be determined." *East Anglian Daily Times*

■**An 11-acre** woodland at Martlesham has been bought by the village's parish council. It was previously owned by developers Grainger PLC responsible for developments on Martlesham Heath. The wood has been looked after by the Portal Woodlands Conservation Group since 1999, planting trees and hedges, conserving two bronze-age burial mounds, repairing Second World War structures, maintaining pathways, and creating wildlife habitats.

■**A Suffolk farm** is pioneering a water storage technique called Managed Aquifer Recharge to capture and store winter rainfall underground for summer irrigation. William Kerr Farms at Hoo, Letheringham is testing the construction and use of an artificial aquifer and assessing its commercial viability.

■**Millions of lettuces** are set to be wasted due to a record outbreak of aphids that has devastated the end of their growing season. Growers are facing losses of £10m, as 30 million heads of lettuce will be rendered unusable, according to the British Leafy Salads Association. The organisation says warm and dry weather has produced 'ideal conditions' for the bugs, with 30 per cent of the crop at risk.

■**The Rural Services** Network has written an open letter to Prime Minister Andy Burnham, urging the Government to ensure its ambition for 'good growth in every postcode' reaches rural England. Signed by RSN chair Roger Phillips and chief executive Kerry Booth, the letter sets out six priorities: unlocking rural growth, securing fair funding, recognising the rural cost of living, delivering the right homes, improving connectivity and ensuring national ambition works in every corner of the country.

■**Love British Food** is calling on the food supply chain to champion British farmers and make choosing British produce 'the natural choice', as the 25th anniversary of *British Food Fortnight* continues to October 11. The call comes as farmers and food businesses navigate significant cost pressures and a challenging trading environment, with organisers arguing that strong, dependable domestic supply chains are more important than ever.

■**Britain's food production** is in decline just as farmers face mounting losses, with the NFU warning that the country is becoming increasingly reliant on imports. NFU analysis published in its *Ready to Grow* report for *Back British Farming Day* shows that UK self-sufficiency has declined in 10 of 11 everyday food categories over the past three decades. At the same time agri-food import volumes have risen by 70 per cent. *Farmers Weekly*

■**The government's Sustainable** Farming Incentive's second window opened around 10am on September 22 and within hours the total pot of £233 million had been allocated. Defra has confirmed that about 12,200 applications were submitted. Country Land and Business Association East director Cath Crowther said: "If the government wants farmers to make long-term decisions for nature, climate and food production, it must provide long-term certainty. SFI is now a crucial part of many farm businesses. We urge Defra to provide clear guidance to farmers who, despite their best efforts, will be unlucky and fail to secure an SFI26 agreement." NFU vice-president Robyn Munt said: "The rapid uptake of the scheme comes as no surprise. We have made the demand clear to Defra for some time. The NFU reported that Suffolk farmer Colin Clifton-Brown said it was a "totally unacceptable farce. It took me an hour to get onto the website to start with and, although I then completed the application, I was unable to submit it, presumably because the window had closed without warning."

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.