

# 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, please contact Brian Chester at [bc@bcnewslink.com](mailto:bc@bcnewslink.com) or call 01572 757600



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■ **Farming industry leaders** have welcomed Defra's response to calls for a more robust Sustainable Farming Incentive for 2023, which provides much needed clarity for farmers planning their businesses. Six more standards have been introduced, including payments for actions on hedgerows, grassland, arable and horticultural land, pest management and nutrient management. Suffolk NFU chairman Andrew Blenkiron regretted the time taken to announce the new schemes. He told the *Eastern Daily Times* that delays had made it difficult for farms to plan ahead. Country Land and Business Association regional director Cath Crowther said a cloud of uncertainty had been lifted and encouraged farmers to look at the options closely. "This is now crunch time and starts to finally bring a degree of clarity," she said.

■ *"There is no quick fix to the problems of our food and farming systems, but there is strength in numbers. Water, soil, habitats and biodiversity aren't just assets - they're the building blocks of how we feed ourselves, and their health is a precondition for viable farm business. We can do many things to ensure this vision of our future food systems comes to fruition, and this consensus clarifies the actions needed to ensure change happens."* Martin Lines of the Nature Friendly Farming Network.

■ **The NFU has welcomed** government action to form a Food and Drink Export Council, in addition to the appointment of eight new 'agri-food attachés' who will serve as the 'UK's eyes, ears and voice in overseas embassies'. The aim is to guard against imports that fall below UK standards and promote UK food in global markets.

■ **Campaign to Protect Rural England** claims there are more than 400,000 homes with planning permission on greenfield sites placing pressure on local services such as doctors, dentists, schools and causing issues on country roads.

■ **Bird friendly** practices on just ten percent of a farm can benefit over half of the farmland bird species, according to RSPB research.

■ **The 10th annual Big Farmland Bird Count** runs from February 3 to 19. Organised by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, it aims to highlight efforts by farmers to reverse the decline in some bird populations.

■ **John Craven**, writing in the *Countryfile* magazine, claims that fly-tipping and illegal dumping in the countryside is costing £1 billion a year with a recent report by MPs criticising Defra and the Environment Agency of making slow and piecemeal progress in tackling the 'antisocial, polluting and costly impacts' of waste crime. Figures from 2020/21 show that in England there were 1.13 million cases of fly-tipping a year (a rise of 16% on the previous year) and just under two-thirds involved household waste. But only around a quarter of waste crime gets reported and there is still no strategy for achieving the Government's target of eliminating it by 2043.

■ **Tom McVeigh**, Kenton Hall, near Debenham, is one of 11 chosen from more than 70 applicants by the National Farmers' Union to be Student & Young Farmer Ambassadors. An arable farmer, Tom graduated from the University of Reading with a bachelor's degree in agriculture and business management in 2018. "I live and breathe farming so I'm delighted to be selected as a farming ambassador and I can't wait to get started," he said.

■ **Free-range eggs** will be reclassified as 'barn eggs' from Wednesday February 1, when a 16-week grace period after birds were compulsorily housed under avian influenza controls, comes to an end. Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex were the first region of England to have a housing order imposed on free-range flocks, on October 12 2022, in an effort to slow the spread of avian influenza. The last confirmed case in Suffolk was on October 16.

■ **Clopton** (Woodbridge) farmer John Taylor is the new director of the Suffolk Show which takes place on May 31 and June 1. Mr Taylor, who runs the family's 3,000-acre farm, will serve as show director for three years.

*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.*