

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 or call 01572 757600



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■ **Farming businesses' ability** to meet the challenges of the future are being held back by poor broadband and mobile connectivity, the NFU's latest Digital Technology Survey has revealed. Despite rural connectivity improving slightly in the last year, only 21% of farmers overall have reliable mobile signals across their whole farm, and fewer than half reported broadband speeds which they say are adequate for their business. One in twenty farmers report that they have no reliable outdoor mobile signal on their farm at all.

■ **A major pre-harvest** health and safety drive by the NFU attracted more than 100 farmers to Lodge Farm, Westthorpe, for workshops covering safe chemical handling, fire safety and crime prevention, basic first aid, transport issues and mental health. NFU Suffolk county representative George Gittus said there was no excuse for compromising on farm safety. "None of us should be in a rush. It's no good thinking that you haven't got time, or a boss telling you that you haven't got time, there is always time to work safely." *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **The UK pig industry** has reduced antibiotic use by 75 per cent over the past eight years exceeding targets set by RUMA – an alliance covering the responsible use of medicines in agriculture.

■ **Defra has given** farmers in England much-needed clarity on how it plans to support them to deliver environmental outcomes which underpin sustainable food production in its new post-Brexit farm payment scheme. The government's bespoke Environmental Land Management schemes have been designed to replace the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and pay farmers public money to deliver nature-friendly farming practices, such as managing crops without insecticides and protecting hedgerows to nurture wildlife. Farmers and land managers will no longer be paid based on the area they farm. Many will have to work harder for their money and there will be higher costs through income forgone and/or capital costs incurred in undertaking land management actions. A 150 page handbook accompanies the announcement. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **A survey** by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and Harper Adams University of farmers' feelings on current major changes in agricultural policy, has revealed that half of those interviewed have yet to adjust their businesses to meet the new rules.

■ **Tilly Abbott**, a sheep farmer from Ipswich, has been named winner of British Wool's 2023 Training and Development Programme in England. Tilly, who is 22, also runs a blog called *The Suffolk Shepherdess*. For more visit: <https://www.britishwool.org.uk/england-training-development-programme-winner>

■ **New definitions** arise in farming from time to time – min-till is now widely used (minimum tillage equating to reduced ploughing); regenerative agriculture goes deeper with its aim of restoring the health of soil and the wider environment and now nanofarming is said to offer 'promising solutions for the future of the global agricultural industry.' Nanotechnology deals with dimensions and tolerances of less than 100 nanometres, especially the manipulation of individual atoms and molecules. Claims include the development of insect-resistant varieties, food processing and storage and increased product shelf life.

■ *"Improved farm productivity can only be achieved through the management and use of new knowledge and technology on farm. We need a farmer not researcher-led decision-making process. Current taxpayer funding of applied and near-market agricultural R&D is not delivering value for money, and a consensus within the farming industry is needed of where R&D investment can give the greatest benefit."* Agribusiness consultant James Wallace writing for the website Science for Sustainable Agriculture.

■ **Uncorked** - There are now more than 900 vineyards in the UK, covering a total of about 10,000 acres which produced an estimated 12m bottles of wine in 2022. It is reported that £480m has been invested in English vineyards in the past five 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.