

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



Issue 120: March 2023

■ **“The shortage of fruit and vegetables** in our supermarkets is a stark reminder that our food security should not be taken for granted. Our shops should never be empty of ingredients that can be produced by farmers and growers in Britain. Our family farms are ideally placed to produce food in the countryside we all cherish, which is cared for by generations of farmers. We're asking the government to act now to help secure a robust supply of homegrown food for everyone now and future generations.” NFU which has produced a blueprint for the future of British farming.

Visit: <https://www.nfuonline.com/media/ag2djfgn/british-farming-a-blueprint-for-the-future.pdf>

■ **A Suffolk** farm club has celebrated its 70th year. Formed in 1952 when the importance of home-produced food had high priority, the Deben Farm Club continues to place emphasis on education and improvement.

■ **A vertical farm** in Suffolk is close to completion, say its operators. The One Farm development is being created inside a disused warehouse in Newmarket and is set to be one of the largest in the UK. The 6,400m sq facility will be capable of producing 415 tonnes of food a year. A second phase, involving an area of 13,000m sq, would increase the overall farm capacity to 1,000t a year. Nine metre-high growing towers will produce a range of vegetables, herbs and greens on demand to avoid waste and unnecessary harvesting - with agreements in place to supply selected retailers. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **Latest statistics** from Defra for the pig population in England show a 20 per cent fall in the female breeding herd. Gilts (maiden sows) not yet in pig were down by 27 per cent and ‘other sows’ by 26 per cent. Heavy financial losses by pig producers and two years of market disruption are the cause. Market prices for farmers have risen but, for many, still remain below the cost of production.

■ **More than** one million fly-tipping incidents were reported in England in the year to March 2022 – despite a four per cent reduction on the previous year. Tim Passmore, chair of the National Rural Crime Network, welcomed the fall, but warned that more needs to be done to hit the government’s target of eradicating waste crime by 2043. “Fly tipping is the anti-social behaviour of the countryside. Any decrease in recorded fly tipping offences is welcome but we mustn’t get complacent,” he said. DEFRA statistics exclude the cost of fly tipping on private land which is estimated to cost as much as £150 million a year.

■ **A survey** by the Countryside Alliance put fly-tipping high on the list of rural crimes along with the theft of agricultural machinery and trespassing. The poll of 2,016 people also found that 49 per cent believed the police did not take rural crime seriously.

■ **UK butterflies** lost six per cent of their abundance at monitored sites and 42 per cent of their distribution between 1976 and 2019, reports Butterfly Conservation. Among individual species, 61 per cent decreased in numbers while 32 per cent increased.

■ **Taking a ‘climate change’** approach to sheep breeding, two farmers in Herefordshire are measuring the methane emissions from a group of rams to select those with the lowest output for breeding. The result should be lambs that also produce less methane.

■ **The Soil Association** reports that the UK’s organic market is worth £3.1 billion with a rise of 1.6 per cent in sales last year - building on 11 years of growth. Shoppers now spend almost £8.5 million a day on organic products.

■ **An increasing number** of farmers are reaching out for help, says farming charity the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, as reports show support to rural communities more than doubled in the past year. As the cost-of-living crisis continues, the charity reported that the number of working families reaching out for support had markedly increased – but cautioned that there is still a long way to go in supporting the wider farming community. *Farmers Weekly*

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.