

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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■ Twelve people died in farm accidents in Great Britain in spring 2023, according to the Health and Safety Executive. In total, there were 27 fatalities across all industries from April to the end of June, meaning agriculture accounted for more than 40% of workplace fatalities. Two members of the public also suffered fatal injuries on farms during this period.

■ Fly tipping continues to plague Suffolk farmers. Andrew Blenkinsop of Euston Estate recently found up to 60 bags of back rubbish dumped at four farm entrances. And he estimates that during the last ten years, 30 lambs on the estate have died after being attacked or chased by dogs. The aggressive attitude of some dog owners is also an issue. Mr Blenkinsop, who is chairman of the Suffolk branch of the NFU and his vice-chairman Glenn Buckingham (Framsden) want the police to have more resources to tackle the crimes.

Report – East Anglian Daily Times.

■ The NFU called for greater police protection for farmers and new legislation to widen the scope of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act when it marked National Rural Crime Action Week. NFU Mutual's rural crime figures show that in 2022 the cost of rural theft in the East of England rose to £6.6m - up 28.5%. Dog attacks alone cost £1.8m. The National Rural Crime Network has sought to reassure rural communities that 'new partnerships are being forged to make our countryside a hostile environment for criminals.'

■ *"Investing in (rural) transport options may mean that public spend in other areas is reduced. But this is a case of the government investing to save. If people can access employment and training, health services etc, the need for spend on benefits and social services may be reduced. And if the figures are not persuasive enough, perhaps it is time for ministers to talk to our isolated communities to truly understand what their life is like."* Rural Services Network chief executive, Kerry Booth.

■ Farmers in Suffolk and Essex have voiced their fears over damage to wildlife and farms from a National Grid scheme involving a high-voltage power network that would cross the two counties and run into Norfolk.

■ Suffolk sheep farmer Stephen Cobbald has gained the Suffolk Sheep Society's highest award – the Bristol Gold Cup. Mr Cobbald, who farms at Sudbury, has a flock of about 100 Suffolks. The award was made against competition from across the UK.

■ Early results from crop trials in Suffolk suggest there are no quick, easy answers to restoring the ecosystem and soils drained of nutrients. Mixed results from new long-term experiment by agricultural research institution Rothamsted show that regenerative practices are unlikely to be a quick fix for agriculture.

■ The NFU has defended British farming's wildlife record, pointing to the 'huge amounts of work' carried out to boost nature, create habitats, and benefit soil health and water quality. Responding to the widely publicised *State of Nature* report that shows continued deterioration, NFU president Minette Batters said: "Hundreds of flower-rich field margins have been developed to provide habitats for bees and other insects, while 149 species were recorded during this year's Big Farmland Bird Count, including 33 species from the Red List for Birds of Conservation Concern."

■ *"At the CLA we firmly believe that the 'public money for public good' model is the right one – for farmers, for the public and for the environment. The Environmental Land Management schemes will work, but it is impossible to ignore the impact that continued delays are having on the confidence of land managers to engage with them. Defra Ministers must recognise the immediate cash flow problems many farmers across England will be having, as the basic payment cuts bite. They must redouble their efforts to ensure applications are processed and payments are made as soon as possible."* CLA East director Cath Crowther

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.