

# 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 01379 669157

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■ **The downpours** of late June brought welcome moisture to many crops – but it never rains but it pours and patches of winter wheat went down in the squalls. The effect of a dry spring following a relatively dry winter will, however, be felt through to harvest. Winter cereal yields could vary enormously - early drilled crops on good soils are promising; later crops can be 'very average' and susceptible to disease. Harvest could make an early start but it's a waiting game. Sugar beet is also patchy and had British Sugar not been short of end product, factory opening dates would have been delayed well into late September or even October to let crops bulk up. As it is, processing is expected to start around mid September. Some crops are very behind due to lack moisture which delayed germination. One thing we have had this spring is good levels of sunlight, so hopefully oil seed rape crops will benefit.

■ **Brian Barker** who farms at Westhorpe, Stowmarket, has been named by the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board as the first strategic farmer in its Farm Excellence project. His selection follows three years as a monitor farm in the programme that aims to help farmers embrace innovation and best practice. The project will run for six years to allow independent research across a full rotation. Approaches used on the farm will be subject to full cost-benefit analyses to help farmers assess the potential for their own farms. Brian said: "Farming is a dynamic and ever-changing industry. If you sleep, you get left behind. I hope this Strategic Farm will help the industry stay alert and remain profitable."

■ **If you would like** to have your say in helping to 'shape a new agenda for the countryside', take a look at a survey being conducted by the Rural Services Network, the community interest company Rural England and researchers from Gloucestershire University. <https://glos.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/rsnruralsurvey>

■ **Germinate** - The Arthur Rank Centre's Rural Ministry Course will run from Tuesday 7 to Thursday 9 November at the King's Park Centre, Northampton. The programme includes practical sessions, group work and workshops led by practitioners. It is designed for lay and ordained ministers across the denominations. Cost £255. <http://germinate.net/training/ruralministrycourse/>

■ **The debate** around the effect of neonicotinoid pesticides on honey bees has been re-ignited with a pan-European report showing indications of harm in this country and Hungary, but less so elsewhere. The general use of these pesticides as a seed treatment on oilseed rape, is presently banned. <https://www.foodandfarmingfutures.co.uk/Library/content/Detail.aspx?ctlID=ZWW hNzBIY2QtZWJjNi00YWZlLWEIMTA tNWExOTFiMijjOWUI &rID=MTM4Njk=&slD=MQ==&bckToL=VHJI ZQ==&qcf=&ph=VHJI ZQ==>

■ **Food facts** from the European Commission: approximately 33 % of the total food produced for human consumption is wasted each year – also contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. One in nine of the global population suffers from chronic undernourishment. In 2014, almost 40 % of adults aged 18 or over were overweight. The commission is organising FOOD 2030 events to encourage answers through research and innovation.

■ **Aptly named**, the FarmCrapApp is a free software tool to help farmers make better use of the nutrients in slurry, farmyard manure and poultry litter.

■ **The Co-op** is to spend £2.5bn over the next three years on sourcing own brand British meat, produce and dairy products from the UK. The retailer will also extend British seasons for home-grown fruit and vegetables, committing to growers with new long-term contracts.

■ **The National Sheep Association** is encouraging arable farmers to bring sheep back to their farms. A 16-page report claims many advantages from keeping sheep on arable farms, including benefits to soil health and structure, helping the control of difficult weeds like blackgrass and improving yields of subsequent crops.

*This newsletter is prepared under the guidance of the Diocesan Rural Affairs Group set up as a means of identifying emerging rural issues and considering how the church should respond.*

