

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 01379 669157

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The NFU's new education roadshow made an appearance at the Suffolk School Farm and Country Fair at Trinity Park, Ipswich on 20th April. The Discovery Barn is a mobile trailer in which games and facts are combined for primary school children to learn without teachers or assistance. No fewer than 4,500 children attended the Fair with its 70 exhibitors.

Pig farmers are having a better year with the trade newsletter the *Weekly Tribune* reporting bacon pig prices rising each week since February 20 - climbing from 151p/kg to 160p/kg.

Florists want us to pick British when we buy flowers. The aim is to raise awareness of the attraction of seasonal British flowers – and improve both the labelling of blooms and recognition of home-grown.

A website which offers free resources for this year's Rural Mission Sunday (16th July) is up and running. The theme is hospitality and welcome. <http://germinate.net/mission/rural-mission-sunday/rural-mission-sunday-2017/>

More than 970 farmers took part in the fourth annual Big Farmland Bird Count, recording 112 species across around 900,000 acres. The count is organised by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The four most abundant species were woodpigeon, starling, rook and fieldfare with chaffinch coming in fifth. The most commonly seen species were blackbirds and woodpigeons. 'Red List' birds such as house sparrow and song thrush were among the top 25 listed.

Suffolk was well down the list of the top 50 places offering 'quality of life' in the UK with just Suffolk Coastal placed - at 36th. South Cambridgeshire came in at number six. Top spot went to the Orkney Islands. Changes in the way the Halifax survey was conducted affected the rankings against previous years.

Suffolk Police are warning against letting security slip as the days get warmer. Open doors and windows are an invitation to opportunistic thieves. Last year almost 30 per cent of burglaries in Suffolk resulted from easy access.

The Rev Canon Sally Fogden has gained a Point of Light Award for her work with The Rural Coffee Caravan, set up to tackle loneliness and isolation in rural communities. The mobile community café and information centre visits villages across Suffolk, offering a place for people of all ages to socialise and access a range of otherwise hard-to-reach services. Last year the caravan made over 180 visits, welcoming 5,800 local residents, with a focus on villages that lack community space. The award comes with a personal letter from the Prime Minister.

A slow down in land sales last year left 40 per cent of farms unsold but 2017 began on a positive note according to Strutt and Parker. However, prices offered are five to ten per cent lower than a year ago. East of England arable land changed hands in the first quarter for £7,000 to £9,500 an acre.

Total income from farming (Tiff) in the UK rose by 1.5 per cent (£59m) to £3.9bn in 2016, according to Defra. Tiff represents business profit with the rise reflecting lower input costs rather than better farmgate prices. The value of output fell by 3.4 per cent to £23.5bn mainly driven by reductions in both volume and value for cereals and milk. *Farmers Weekly*

A study funded by Rural Business Research and the Institute of Agri-Food Research and Innovation has put the cost of the ban on neonicotinoid seed treatments for oilseed rape in 2016 at £18.4m. The ban led to almost 28,800ha of lost crop. Researchers said that farmers trying to control cabbage stem beetle with other products used more pesticides than those who had access to neonicotinoid-treated seed.

A prediction in *Private Eye* (1442) that it won't be long before it will be possible to drive from Dover to York without seeing a single dairy cow, following the decision by a milk processor not to take supplies from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent because of transport costs, will be underlined by news from Dairy Crest that it will be dropping its milk price by 1p/litre in June and again in July.

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.

