

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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Sarah Baker, senior analyst at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, has warned farmers against a 'wait and see' approach to Brexit. Such a policy is high-risk, she says. There were measures, such as benchmarking comparisons with other farm businesses, that could be taken now to mitigate the effects of leaving the EU.

Top spots: Andrew Francis of Elveden Farms was named as Arable Innovator of the Year at a national farming awards ceremony in Birmingham. This year's Suffolk Farm Business Awards were gained by Fletcher & Dunt, Park Farm, Charsfield (farms of up to 250 acres); Porters Farms (Walpole) Ltd, Hillhouse Farm, Walpole (up to 500 acres) and Plant Larter Farms, Framlingham (over 500 acres). Stephen Cobbald, of Acton Hall, Sudbury, gained the top spot in the Suffolk Sheep Society's Midland and East of England flock competition.

The European Commission has proposed extending the licence of the herbicide glyphosate for five years after its ten-year renewal plan failed to attract enough support from member states. The current licence is due to expire on December 15.

Shine a light in the darkness to deter opportunistic thieves, says Suffolk Police. Chief Inspector Stuart Grimsey said: "Leaving your house in complete darkness is a clear sign to burglars that it may be empty. Consider leaving a light on or invest in a timer so that your lights or radio come on automatically at certain times to give the impression that someone is at home."

Farmers are 'clustering' to share thoughts and experience on wildlife issues. Views are accepted when expressed farmer-to-farmer within informal groups, a conference called by Natural England was told.

Sales of antibiotics for use in animals in the UK have fallen to their lowest level since records began in 1993, dropping by 27% between 2014 and 2016 - and beating a government target. The latest UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance report shows that antibiotics used across all food-producing animals fell to 45mg/kg last year. The government had set a target of 50mg/kg by 2018.

Fresh produce suppliers are under acute financial pressure, according to business analyst Plimsoll. Out of 1,270 leading companies surveyed, about a quarter - 345 - made a loss in the past 12 months; 256 were categorised as in 'danger' and 176 as needing 'caution'. Retailers are reported to be resisting requests from suppliers to pass on higher production costs. Suffolk is a major producer of field vegetable crops.

A depleted workforce is posing the 'very real threat' that fresh crops - such as cabbages, onions, leeks, carrots, parsnips and leafy salads - could be left in the ground because there is no one to harvest or pack them, according to the British Growers' Association.

The Agricultural Christian Fellowship has a conference planned at Worcester on 14th November under the banner *A Hope and a Future for Farming*. Speakers include Donald Curry, farmer and community champion and Richard Jackson, Bishop of Lewes, a former agricultural consultant. Enquiries: cj@agriculturalchristianfellowship.org.uk

The Revd Canon Sandie Barton, parish priest of four villages around the edge of Mildenhall, is the new diocesan environmental officer. The role is to support the Church of England's carbon reduction target of 42 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050.

The Revd Canon Sally Gaze was licensed as the diocesan Dean for Rural Mission Consultancy by Bishop Martin on October 30. She comes to Suffolk from Norfolk where she was team rector in the Tas Valley.

For a revealing assessment of the reality of rural homelessness visit: <http://www.rsonline.org.uk/analysis/rural-homelessness---an-invisible-issue>

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.

