

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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Suffolk is a happy place according to the Office of National Statistics. Mid Suffolk is the third happiest spot in the UK with Suffolk Coastal at fourth. Craven in North Yorkshire and the Orkney Islands are the only two places with better ratings.

“Ministers have for too long shirked the responsibility to make sure we are building the right mix of housing across the country, including homes for first time buyers to social homes to rent. We need to be clearer on what we are building and where, for young people and families and for our countryside.” Trinley Walker, housing policy advisor to the Council for Protection of Rural England. The CPRE also claims that, according to present estimates, local authorities are currently planning to build just 25,500 affordable homes against an assessed need of 46,100.

Sows are producing more piglets than ever before. For outdoor herds the average is 23.52 weaners per sow per year; indoor the total is 26.61.

Pig prices have fallen steadily for the past eight weeks as supplies moved ahead of demand and competition increased from lower priced continental pork and bacon. The average UK price of 161.04p per kg, however, is still well ahead of last year's end of September figure of 141.03.

The contentious issue of feeding cereals to animals rather than humans is back in the headlines with a report in *Global Food Security* which argues that livestock place less burden on the human food supply than previously reported.

<https://www.foodandfarmingfutures.co.uk/Library/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=ZWVhNzBIY2Q0tZWJjNi00YWZiLWEIMTA0tNWExOTFiMijjOWU1&rID=MTQ0Nzk=&sID=MQ0=&bckToL=VHJlZQ0=&qcf=&ph=VHJlZQ0=>

“A huge increase in the number of sheep, goats and poultry that are not stunned or not stunned effectively before slaughter is a grave concern to our profession. Millions of individual animals are affected, making this a major animal welfare issue. The supply of meat from these animals massively outstrips the demand from the communities for which it is intended and is entering the mainstream market unlabelled.”

Gudrun Ravetz, president of the British Veterinary Association.

The importance of trees to the environment is shown in a study by Exeter University which indicates that 5,000 trees can, over a year, stop 4,217 m³ of water – two Olympic swimming pools – from flooding rivers while also absorbing the equivalent of the nitrogen dioxide produced by 798 family cars.

“Many farmers, I believe, are suffering from head in sand syndrome thinking that current level of government subsidies will be maintained beyond Brexit. Farm diversification is critical to spread risk so that income is not purely farming alone. It has been said that 70% of all UK farming business would have made a loss if the subsidies had not been paid last year. Uncertainty is the worry.”

Brian Barker who farms near Stowmarket and is soon to launch the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board's first Strategic Farm.

Suffolk Police are asking for views on perceptions of crime, anti-social behaviour and local policing services. Visit <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Suffolk-CSS-2017> The survey should take about ten minutes.

Health and social care came out top in a list of rural concerns published at this year's annual Rural Services Network Rural Conference in September. This early evidence of concern about healthcare provision comes at a time when many countryside communities face the withdrawal of vital GP services, NHS Service re-configurations and general recruitment difficulties, says the RSN.

A Suffolk farmer is this year's winner of the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group National Silver Lapwing Award. Edward Flatt of Eastwood Farm, Lound, near Lowestoft, gained the accolade for outstanding commitment to good environmental practices, combined with high quality food production, on his 360-acre farm. Edward, chosen from a national shortlist of seven, grows a rotation of spring beans, winter barley, spring barley and sugar beet.

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.

