

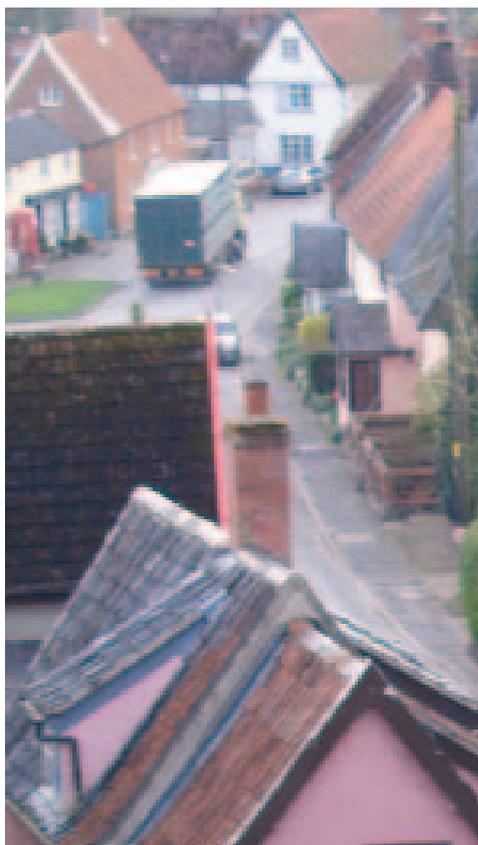
Rural Report

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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■ **The combination** of housing birds and escalating feed costs is putting free range egg producers under heavy pressure. All poultry must be kept indoors to restrict the spread of avian influenza and the impact of the Ukraine crisis on commodity market has added to an existing rise in feed bills. Alastaire Brice, Havensfield Happy Hens based at Hoxne, near Eye, told the *East Anglian Daily Times* that the free-range production would shrink unless egg prices rise. "We are at the spearhead of a real problem in the next six months," he said. "The industry will implode on itself if it does not compensate for what is going on. Our costs have gone through the roof at the same time as these unprecedented risks from bird flu. The feed price has gone up £120 per tonne in the last month."

■ **Seven cases** of avian influenza have been reported in Suffolk in the past month. The latest outbreak was near Stowmarket.

■ **A study** by an international team of researchers involving 7000 audio recordings has produced an algorithm able to decode the emotions of a pig. The recordings were collected in a wide range of situations encountered by commercial stock. Apparently short grunts are happy grunts.

■ **British Sugar** has responded to pressure on growers of rising costs of fuel and fertiliser by offering to pay at least £27 per tonne for the crop in the 2022/23 season. The company acknowledges that growers are exposed to 'significant cost inflation'.

■ **War in Ukraine**, eye-watering price rises, labour and supply shortages and lingering uncertainties around what new UK farm policies will mean in practice are causing turmoil across the food production sector, East Anglian farmers were told at the Suffolk Farming Conference at Trinity Park, Ipswich. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **"The conflict in Ukraine** has triggered a humanitarian tragedy, and the effects are being felt across the world. Of course, our members' thoughts will turn to those coming to terms with the devastating effects of the conflict. While government attention is rightly focused on attempts to resolve the crisis, we must also draw attention to dealing with the consequences for the UK. The disruption to our food output, supply chains, availability and affordability, could last for many years." *NFU statement*

■ **Britain's farm shops** generate £1.4 billion in sales nationally, employing 25,000 workers, according to research by Harper Adams University. And they have proved to be invaluable throughout the pandemic with 89% of farm retailers reporting an increase in sales since 2019.

■ **Lavenham Farmers' Market** has won top recognition by gaining the 'Best in UK' title at the National Farm Retail Awards in Newcastle.

■ **Active earthworms** may be of more value for farms and gardens than was previously thought. The role of soil animals such as earthworms in nutrient cycling is traditionally seen as beneficial but indirect, slow and cumulative. However, this may not be the whole story, says Professor Olaf Schmidt, from the University of Dublin School of Agriculture and Food Science. "Up to now we assumed this process involved slow decomposition and microbial cycling. But our experiments show that nitrogen and carbon movement from living soil animals to plants can be extremely rapid," he said.

■ **Bury St Edmunds Farmers Club** has elected a female chair of its management committee for the first time in its 75-year history. Karen Ridgeon takes over the task from Simon Spence QC who has been the club's chair for the past four years and stood down from the role at the recent annual meeting.

■ **Farmers** are being urged to turn their farmyards into fortresses. Concern is growing that a combination of high prices and shortages could lead to a surge in farmers' red diesel tanks and fertiliser stores becoming targets for theft.

Farmers Weekly

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.