

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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As part of its *Back British Farming* campaign, the NFU has produced a short topic-by-topic report under the title *British Farming – Inspiring a Nation*. Visit: https://www.nfuonline.com/media/3e3fmoec/british-farming-inspiring-a-nation.pdf?utm_source=b021122&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=bulletin

A survey by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) has revealed concerns among village halls that high energy costs are ‘causing financial difficulties’ and need government support to be extended beyond March.

Suffolk farmers reflected on a year plagued by bird flu, field fires and political turbulence at their annual meeting, reports the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Members of the NFU’s Suffolk branch expressed exasperation and frustration at the uncertainty clouding their future in a year when turmoil at the top of government has led to vital decisions being delayed or shelved. But they paid tribute to the efforts of the county’s fire crews after the summer heatwave.

‘2021 was a particularly difficult year for pig producers in the UK. Increased feed costs and lower pig prices, coupled with a backlog of pigs due to butcher shortages in abattoirs, all resulted in negative margins last year. And although pig prices increased significantly from April this year, they have not been sufficient to cover the continued elevated cost of production.’

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board lead analyst Carol Davis.

Zoe Leach, former chief executive of the National Pig Producers Association and now regional director of NFU East, has gained the David Black Award for her ‘outstanding contribution to the pig industry’. Ben and Georgina Woolf, of Oak House Farm, Sproughton have been named as Pedigree Breeders of the Year.

Organic farmer John Pawsey of Shimpling Park Farm, Bury St Edmunds and Glenn Buckingham, who uses regenerative farming practices at the Helmingham Estate, Debenham have gained awards from the farming conservation farming body Suffolk FWAG..

Avian flu continues to hit poultry producers. Cases were reported in east Suffolk and the Breckland, Norfolk in the last week of November. Reports of a ‘Christmas turkey shortage’ were also catching headlines.

The British Free Range Egg Producers Association asked Sainsbury’s for an urgent meeting after the retailer confirmed it is stocking eggs imported from Italy. Robert Gooch, BFREPA chief executive, said he was not surprised by the development, which follows warnings made in March that the country would be short of British eggs by Christmas if farmers were not paid a sustainable price.

According to figures published by Health and Safety at Work, 4,100 of 100,000 farm staff reported an injury in the 12 months to March 2022, compared with an average of 1,110 injuries in 100,000 across all other industries. The report also estimates that the cost to the farming sector at around £279m.

‘It’s this camaraderie that brings farmers together, not only with each other but with the local community. You’ll find farmers out spreading salt in the snow and towing stranded cars out of hedges. They’ll move fallen trees, visit the elderly and think nothing of spending an evening encouraging others in local politics, or sitting up all night with a sick calf.’

Tom Martin, who has a mixed arable and sheep farm in East Anglia, writing in the *Prospect Magazine*.

Jeremy Clarkson, who gained credibility with farmers for speaking out over the realities of food production, is testing ‘regenerative farming’ in one of his fields. Writing in *The Times*, Mr Clarkson explained how he was growing wheat and beans in a single field simultaneously because he had been unable to afford the fertiliser he would normally use on his crops. “With regenerative farming, however, you think about pounds (£) rather than pounds (lb),” he wrote. “You accept that you grow less, but recognise because you are using less fertiliser, insecticide and diesel, your profit margins are higher.”

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.