

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, contact brianrobertchester@gmail.com or call 01572 757600



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■ **The National Police Chiefs' Council** has announced a three-year strategy to tackle the growing threat to rural communities posed by organised crime. It aims to identify crime hotspots and track patterns of offending across the country. Deputy Chief Constable Nigel Harrison, the Council's lead for Rural and Wildlife Crime, said: "Up and down the country we have officers, often in dedicated rural crime units, working with partner organisations to tackle rural and wildlife crime, engage with communities and disrupt criminal activity in rural areas. This strategy sets out clear priorities to help focus these efforts."

■ **More and more** farmers are considering diversification as a way to build resilience for their farming businesses. Defra estimates that over 71 per cent of farming businesses in England had some diversified activity in 2023/24. Since 2014/15, this proportion has gradually increased by ten percentage points. NFU Mutual estimates that 17 per cent of farmers are planning new diversification projects over the next five years, and 40 per cent of those who have already diversified intend to expand.

Annabel Twinborrow, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board

■ *'Farmers are feeling the strain of a food system that isn't working as it should - tight margins, climate pressures and supply chains that too often reward the wrong things. It's a model that leaves farmers carrying risks the wider system hasn't resolved. At the same time, across the NFFN network, farmers are showing what a more resilient future could look like: rebuilding soils, restoring nature and shaping businesses that work with, rather than against, the land. Policy shifts are needed to make these approaches the norm rather than the exception.'*

Ellie Bentham, Nature Friendly Farming Network.

■ **Here's a new word** – Agrivoltaics (the integration of solar photovoltaic panels with agricultural production).

■ *'British agriculture is at a tipping point. Competing land-use pressures could see a quarter of our farmland lost and food production fall by a third by 2050. Without radical policy change to boost farm-level productivity alongside environmental goals, we risk ever-increasing dependence on food imports at a time when climate shocks, conflict and geopolitical instability are threatening supply chains around the world. A new report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture sets out a, science-led plan to reverse stalled productivity growth.'*

APPGSTA chair George Freeman

■ **One of just** three farmers across the country to reach the finals of the Farmers' Weekly Pig Farmer of the Year Award, Chris Fogden gained the praise of judges for his 'determination in the face of adversity, and as such has been able to build up a profitable, sustainable pig business, which is continually achieving good results'. Chris estimates that during a 'dark period' for the pig industry in the early 2020s he lost half a million pounds - and had to raid his own pension pot to stay afloat. Some producers left the industry altogether - but Chris hung on. Today he is a contract breeder, managing 1,200 high herd health sows for Ian Mosey Livestock. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ *'The idea is simple but powerful: neighbouring farmers come together to improve wildlife habitat on a landscape scale, supported by shared knowledge. The Farmer Cluster concept began in 2014 as a GWCT pilot funded by Natural England. It grew rapidly with over 220 clusters now covering more than 450,000 hectares (in comparison, 224 National Nature Reserves cover 116,000 hectares).* Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

■ **Sugar beet growers** will face increased competition from imports with the existing tariff-free quota set to be expanded from the start of next year. The government confirmed its plans to expand the quota, following an industry consultation. Of the 31 responses, 14 wanted the increase, arguing it would support the UK raw cane refining industry. *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.