

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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■ **A UK-wide** review of farm assurance has called for a fundamental reset of the system to rebuild confidence among farmers. The review, established by the UK farming unions and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, was carried out by four independent commissioners. It concluded that farm assurance is critical to the industry's future in giving assurance to consumers but must make fundamental changes to meet growing frustration in how it is delivered. Lead commissioner, Dr David Llewellyn, said: "Significant changes are needed to win back farmer confidence, to build on what already works well and to secure a competitive edge for UK farming on the world stage."

■ **An egg producer** operating across Suffolk and Norfolk has welcomed tighter government restrictions imposed to keep bird flu at bay. Tighter biosecurity measures for flocks took effect on Saturday, January 25, for the whole of England and Scotland following an increase in cases. Suffolk and Norfolk flocks are already under a mandatory housing order - the highest level of restrictions - imposed in December. Alastaire Brice of Havensfield Happy Hens at Hoxne, Eye, said it was 'Russian roulette at the moment' and the disease could strike anywhere. He felt the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had learnt lessons from the disastrous bird flu outbreak of 2022/23. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **The government** said it will do 'whatever it takes' to protect British farmers from foot and mouth disease after a 'worrying' outbreak was confirmed in Germany. The highly contagious livestock virus had a devastating impact on East Anglia's farms and rural communities in 2001, when six million animals were slaughtered across the country in an epidemic which cost an estimated £12.8bn to the economy. The UK has been free of the disease since the end of a subsequent outbreak in 2007, but the risk level has been raised after a new FMD case was confirmed in a herd of water buffalo near Berlin on January 10. Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner told the House of Commons that Defra has taken 'rapid action to protect the UK', including suspending imports of cattle, sheep and pigs from Germany and restricting personal imports. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **Tesco ticks boxes:** "The successful Tesco Future Farmer programme is a great example of how farmers, retailers and researchers at universities like Harper Adams can all strive together to build a sustainable future. The challenge of moving our food and farming systems towards Net Zero and ensuring food security at the same time is huge, and we all need to work together to take it on." Harper Adams University's School of Sustainable Food and Farming (2025)

■ **AI!** AI could be used to predict how well seed potatoes will grow into healthy potato plants. Developed by biologists from Utrecht University in collaboration with the Delft University of Technology along with plant breeders, the tool uses DNA data from bacteria and fungi found on seed potatoes and drone images of potato fields. The researchers said: "This marks the beginning of a new era in farming, where microbiology and AI come together to enhance agriculture."

■ **Fen Farm Dairy**, Bungay has won Best British Cheese award for the third year running. Its Baron Bigod was placed top of the list in the Fine Food Digest annual best brands survey.

■ **Recent** statistics from the Health and Safety Executive show that 14 people were killed on UK farms between April and September 2024. The causes of these incidents include moving machinery, ATVs (two of which were children), falls from height, asphyxiation, and crush injuries involving livestock, machinery or falling objects.

■ **More than** 42,000 farms in England and Scotland will be affected by the changes to Inheritance Tax, with cereal farms the hardest hit according to the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board. Its analysis shows that more than 75% of farms larger than 50 hectares will be impacted. In England, 80% of farms or 33,286 will be affected, while in Scotland the figures are 67% / 13,336.

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.