

# 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](mailto:bc@bcnewslink.com) or call 01572 757600



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■ *'Farmers and landowners, across the globe, are dealing with the most significant 'catch-22' situation faced for generations - the growing need to produce better quality and higher quantity food while securing a sustainable and biodiverse future for our environment. WildEdges can go a long way towards solving this problem. Creating a WildEdge around fields will transform local habitats and biodiversity, while increasing field productivity and protecting waterways.'* Tom Hopkin, founder of Land app which helps to identify areas best suited to creating 'wild edges'.

■ **What does** a modern combine harvester and a Diplodocus have in common? One answer, it seems, is their footprints on the soil. A study led by researchers from Sweden and Switzerland has found that the weight of farming machinery today is approaching that of the largest animals to have roamed the Earth.

■ **What's** in a word? Try this one – fertigation. Answer at the end of this report.

■ **Close to** 2000 farmers and land managers took part in this year's Big Farmland Bird Count in February. Despite challenges with the weather, they spotted 420,000 individual birds and 130 species across 1.5 million acres of farmland.

■ **According to** a report in the *East Anglian Daily Times* farmers in the region have been 'taken aback' by new charges for licences to abstract water to irrigate crops. Paul Bradford, director of Sustainable Water Solutions, a specialist consultancy for water abstractors based in Framlingham, said his farmer clients were both appalled and stunned by the increases. One example quoted cites a rise of 140 times the original amount.

■ **Waitrose** and the Co-op have shown what can be done, with investments of £16 million and £19m respectively, to ensure pig farmers' prices reflect soaring costs of production. Given their market share, this commitment to British pig production puts the contributions of bigger players, such as Tesco's £6.6m investment, Sainsbury's £2.8m and the unknown actions of Asda and Morrisons, into perspective. The Co-op has a market share of just 6%, but its support outstrips all of the big four retailers combined, which together have a market share of almost 70%. *Comment in the pig industry newsletter Weekly Tribune.*

■ **With pig** producers experiencing negative margins since October 2020, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board has estimated (based on total slaughter numbers to April 2022) that the industry has lost over £500m.

■ **Tesco has** updated the feed tracker contracts to its five shell egg suppliers - which includes Anglia Free Range Eggs - in a show of support to producers who are grappling with inflation and soaring feed and energy costs. The new five-year contract will mean the supermarket remains 100% British on all its shell eggs.

■ **Milk processor** Arla increased its farmgate milk price for a standard manufacturing litre by 4.49p/litre from June 1. This 10% price increase will lift prices to 47.79p/litre.

■ **A cash** advance of 25% has been announced by British Sugar and NFU Sugar ahead of the 2022-23 season to help ease pressure on beet growers. The advance payment is interest-free and is due to be paid to farmers during the third week of June - about four months ahead of when growers would typically receive payment. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **The NFU** has appointed a new regional director for East Anglia. Dr Zoe Davies will be a familiar face to many farmers in her current role as chief executive of the National Pig Association. She says she is excited by the opportunity to lead the NFU's work across a region with a total agricultural output of £3.4 billion. "East Anglia is a fantastic region. There is a wide variety of forward-thinking farm businesses there and the NFU is well placed to work on their behalf," she said. "It's not been an easy decision to leave the NPA but I am looking forward to the challenges my new role will bring"

■ **Fertigation** is the process of applying liquid or water-soluble fertilisers through irrigation systems to simultaneously supply plants with their daily water and nutrient needs.

*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.*