

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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■ **Avian influenza** continues to spread across the country with more counties listed as prevention zones. The virus has been found in a small number of grey seals on the north Norfolk coast. Wild birds have also been infected.

■ **EcoPower Suffolk** has announced plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, on land at Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley. The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State.

■ *"We all recognise the climate emergency and the need to do all we can to address it. However, by perpetuating anti-livestock rhetoric within its own echo chamber, the CCC has fallen into an 'Emperor's new clothes' policy for which they will get plaudits, but without justification. We need to step back and see clearly the carbon services provided every day of the week by hard-working dairy and livestock farmers throughout the United Kingdom."* George Dunn, chief executive of the Tenant Farmers' Association commenting on the latest report of the Climate Change Committee.

■ **Just published** legislation needed to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 was welcomed by the chief executive of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Professor Mario Caccamo, as a 'truly historic moment for plant science - the first time in more than 30 years that new legislation has been brought forward in this country which seeks to enable, rather than to further restrict, the use of genetic innovation in agriculture.'

■ **The English countryside** is 'drowning in rubbish', with 1.5m incidents of fly-tipping reported in the past year (2023-24) – up six percent on previous figures – with large incidents costing local authorities £13.1m, latest Defra figures have revealed. The figures primarily cover highways, including pavements and roads, and but not the majority of private-land incidents. Under-reporting remains an issue. *Farmers Weekly*

■ **According to** scientific studies, three-quarters of all insects have disappeared in the last 30 years. To counter this decline, scientists from 13 countries are collaborating on a new approach which aims to make crops, rather than the environment, more attractive to pollinators such as wild bees and butterflies. "In doing so, we aim for a win-win situation for both farmers and insects," says research associate Andries Temme from Wageningen University and Research.

■ *"Our findings make it clear that the consumption of red and processed meat has a cost – not just to people's health and to the planet – but also to healthcare systems and the economy. Governments don't need to tell people what they can and can't eat, but they have a responsibility to encourage the adoption of healthy and sustainable diets. And making sure the health costs of foods are reflected in their prices is an important component of that."* Marco Springmann, Oxford Martin School.

■ *"There needs to be a better understanding of hare coursing across the whole criminal justice system, including all police officers, not just in the rural crime teams, as well as with police call handlers and magistrates. Hare coursing is a serious crime that impacts farmers financially and their mental health. With serious criminals operating on their land, often behaving in a very intimidating way, farmers don't feel safe in their own homes. On top of this, there are animal welfare issues for both hares and the dogs."* Freya Morgan, chair of the Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire NFU.

■ **The government** has launched a consultation on a new approach to managing land use in England to balance the needs of farming, food security, environment, biodiversity and housing and development.

■ **Payments to** farmers under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme are to rise. Farm Minister Steve Reed is quoted as saying: "I will consider my time as Secretary of State a failure if I do not improve profitability for farmers across the country."

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.