

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



Issue 145: May 2025

■ **The CLA has warned** the Chancellor not to 'sell out' British farming in any trade deals or agreements with the USA. Victoria Vyvyan, CLA president said: "Letting in cheap food that's illegal to produce here isn't trade – it's betrayal. It undermines the very standards we ask our farmers to uphold, while piling pressure on businesses already struggling with rising costs and punitive taxes."

■ *"The unpredictability of our seasons is becoming too hard to ignore. Overcoming the growing challenges requires a combination of innovative strategies, practical adaptations, and long-term planning. This isn't just about adapting to rain, sun, or snow anymore; it's about rethinking everything from the ground up, including farm infrastructure."* Stuart Jones, ADAS (2025)

■ **Biomass** (organic material derived from plants and animals, that can be used to produce energy) is currently the EU's largest renewable energy source. A comprehensive analysis, led by Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, now shows that biomass is crucial for Europe's ability to reach its climate targets, as it can be used to produce fossil-free fuels and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

■ *"Using biomass as a source of energy contributes towards reaching net zero. Fossil fuels are a one-way street in terms of carbon production. They release carbon into the atmosphere without absorbing any. They also take millions of years to form. Biomass, when burnt, releases heat and also recaptures carbon during its growing phase and is quicker to use."* Farming Connect (2025)

■ **The UK** strawberry industry is facing significant financial strain, with growers exiting the sector and domestic production declining by 25 per cent in just six years. Now a third of strawberries are imported, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable, homegrown solutions to meet demand. NIAB (2025)

■ *"The current threats posed by the emergence of foot and mouth disease in eastern Europe and ongoing worries over diseases like bluetongue, avian influenza and African swine fever are very concerning for farmers across Norfolk and East Anglia. The scale of the illegal meat trade is shocking and this must be tackled as a matter of urgency. These diseases threaten the future of many local farm businesses in this region."* NFU Norfolk chairman Graham Shadrack,

■ **A premium** turkey producer is investing heavily in the future of his business. Paul Kelly - who runs three-generation family business Kelly Turkeys in Essex - is spending half a million pounds in upgrading his operation. This is despite a downturn in turkey sales overall in the UK. His company - which sells to farmers and butchers across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk - has reversed the trend by more than doubling its volume of Christmas turkey sales. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **At least eleven** applications have been made for major solar farms along the A140 corridor over the last five years, mainly centering on projects around Eye, including Ecopower Suffolk and the Marsh Lane Solar Farm, reports the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Four of the projects are sited within a 4km radius making up more than 3,300 acres. The 123-acre Marsh Lane Solar Farm in Palgrave, was approved by Mid Suffolk District Council on April 9. The developer said the site would provide energy to power 18,996 homes in its 35-year lifetime and create 20 full-time jobs in the area. Stephen Rash, a farmer from Wortham whose land will partially be used for the solar farm, said the project would support his business. He said: "This project is not a threat to food security; it is a safeguard."

■ **The just completed** Great British Beef Week (April 23 to 30) turned the spotlight on farmers and fields. "It all starts on our beautiful green pasture fields, ideal for raising healthy cattle," says Martha Hayes, member of Ladies in Beef. "As farmers, we have a crucial role in caring for our countryside, and that naturally includes the incredible wildlife, hares and lapwing to grey partridge, we see on our farmland through the seasons."

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.