

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 or call 01572 757600



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■ **A group of food** and farming organisations has urged Defra to put £5m into a pilot fund aimed at setting up 15 new food hubs. Sustain, the Sustainable Food Trust, the Soil Association, the Nature Friendly Farming Network UK and the Landworkers' Alliance are among the signatories to a letter sent to Defra farming minister Mark Spencer asking his department to help. The group says fund would support jobs, create fairer supply chains and improve environmental outcomes from the sector, while showing 'the best of British food.'

■ **Three activists** from the movement Animal Rising were arrested after taking three lambs from a royal estate at Sandringham. The incident was described as 'a rescue mission to save the lambs from slaughter'. The National Pig Association recently warned members that farms are increasingly being targeted by animal rights groups which use a range of tactics to discredit individual farms and farming as a whole.

■ **Seven out of ten** rural households say their financial situation has deteriorated over the last year according to a survey by the Rural Services Network. A total of 6,780 residents took part - two thirds of householders had little income left after paying essentials; a fifth had no 'surplus' or their expenditure exceed income. Nine out of ten reported cutting back on heating and visits to 'hospitality venues'.

■ **A report from** the Changing Markets Foundation claims that 'greenwashing' in the meat and dairy sector in which products are given environmental credentials is 'rampant and extensive' and with questionable sustainability. The report urges regulators to act to avoid 'businesses capitalising on people's environmental concerns without taking positive action for the environment.'

■ **A charity** that focuses on social mobility 'coldspots' has claimed that young people in rural and coastal areas are twice as likely to abandon career hopes than teenagers in city and urban locations. Difficulties in finding work experience and the cost of further education are cited as reasons. <https://rsnonline.org.uk/rural-households-left-feeling-isolated-by-the-cost-of-living-crisis>

■ **Financial pressures** and political upheaval have driven farmers' confidence down to its lowest level since the start of the Covid pandemic, according to an industry survey. The National Farmers' Union said its survey reflects the spiralling cost of agricultural production with 88% of farmers saying they are being negatively affected by high input costs such as energy, fuel and fertiliser. Also, 82% of farmers said the phasing out of EU subsidies, which are being replaced with a system of environmental payments after Brexit, is hitting business confidence. In East Anglia, farming leaders said this lack of confidence is restricting business investments, which could damage the nation's food security at a time when we have already seen supermarket shortages of produce including eggs, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **Extensive research** by the RABI has shown that: 36% of the farming community is probably or possibly depressed; 58% of women experience mild, moderate or severe anxiety; commonly reported sources of stress include regulation, compliance and inspection, Covid-19, bad/unpredictable weather, loss of subsidies/future trade deals; over half (52%) experience pain and discomfort, one in four has a mobility problem and 21% have problems undertaking usual tasks. The research included a survey which attracted 15,000 responses.

■ **A new community** pantry has opened in Suffolk to provide free food and help reduce food waste. The Reydon and Southwold community pantry is based at Reydon Village Hall providing food donated by supermarkets and local stores.

■ **Suffolk farmers** could benefit from government money to help build new reservoirs and improve water security on farms. The government is offering up to 40% of the cost of a range of measures to protect crops from the threat of drought.

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.