

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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■ **Over the border** - but a sign of the times. Construction work is reported to have finished on the world's largest 'vertical farm' - a £25m agri-science project on the Food Enterprise Park, at Easton, Norfolk creating 25,000sqm of stacked growing space on racks of shelving. Fischer Farms, the company behind the project, says the four-acre site will have the capacity to provide a continuous supply of leaf salad, lettuce, leafy herbs and other fresh produce to UK supermarkets.

■ **Farming leaders** have told Suffolk Coastal MP Thérèse Coffey, now environment secretary, that urgent steps are needed to bring clarity to government policy. Zoe Leach, East Anglia regional director for the National Farmers' Union, said: "After months of uncertainty, farming businesses are crying out for a clear steer on the government's future strategy for agriculture and horticulture. They need to plan for the future."

■ **Free range egg producers** continue to struggle. The British Free Range Egg Producers Association has called for the whole industry to come together by backing its Egg Pledge - a commitment to work towards a more sustainable future and stop businesses collapsing.

■ **A hi-tech farming robot** has been weeding a parsnip field in an East Anglian technology trial. The Robotti is a tractor which navigates with satellite-guided accuracy of within 2cm, using attachments for farm operations such as seeding, weeding and spraying. The Danish-built robot is being trialled by Frederick Hiam, a Brandon-based fresh produce business with farms in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ **The Department** of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has reported that the long-term trend of butterfly populations on farmland in England has shown little or no overall change since 1990 - but in woodland, numbers have fallen 'significantly'.

■ **Commercial strawberry** yields using 'total controlled environmental agriculture conditions', are indicating a huge potential for high quality plant material in new vertical farming practices, says the crop research organisation National Institute of Agricultural Botany. Using the variety Malling™ Champion, the highest yielding plants produced 3.2 kg of fruit, more than double the yield expected from typical 'everbearer' plants in commercial production.

■ **NFU Mutual's Voice of the Farmer** study has found that 28% plan to either cease farming or reduce their activities compared to 20% last year. A third of farmers polled have also diversified their activities, running commercial activities on their farm. The study, of a representative sample of 1,654 farmers across the UK, also found their overall age had risen. More than half of the farmers surveyed (57%) were over 65, while just 5.4% were under 45.

■ **More than half** of the arable land sold so far this year has exceeded £10,000/acre - and all previous records, according to Strutt & Parker research. Tight supply and strong demand are given as the reason for an overall price rise of 4%. The average for the first nine months of the year was £9,800/acre - a figure that is expected to increase in the remaining months.

■ *"The good news for salad crops, including cucumbers, is that they are in the top 10 of vegetables regularly purchased by food shoppers in the UK. Worryingly, the higher purchasing households tend to be those who are older, richer, and without children. We need to introduce our children to eat such items sooner rather than later in their lives. Also, learn from other countries, how to use salad crops as breakfast and snack items - they're on breakfast buffet tables in many British hotels, so put them out at home, with a healthy & tasty dip."*

Prof David Hughes and Miguel Flavián,
Supermarkets in Your Pocket

<https://supermarketsinyourpocket.com/2022/10/26/up-your-marketing-game-to-make-the-best-of-challenging-times-in-fresh-produce-the-case-of-cucumbers/>

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.