

The Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life, Hereford Diocese

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Dear Colleague,

March 2006 Agricultural Briefing

A few notes which I hope will be helpful in your dealings with the farming community.

TB Update

“This consultation is the perhaps the most important for the livestock sector in a generation” (NFU). The National Beef Association and the NFU are urging farmers to respond to the government’s consultation on proposals to cull badgers. The Defra consultation continues until 10th March and copies are available by post from: Bovine TB and Badgers Consultation, Defra, 1a Page Street, London SW1 4PQ, or via www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/badgers-tbcontrols/index.htm. The RSPCA has begun campaigning to generate public interest against a cull of badgers (its “*Back Off Badgers*” campaign) stating that badgers are being made the scapegoat and that effective cattle-based measures should be the focus of control.

Defra have recently published guidance on how the pre-movement testing for TB would operate (see February briefing). Cattle over 15 months old from farms which operate under the one or two-yearly testing regimes should be tested if they are to be moved from the farm, unless they are moving direct to slaughter, to an approved or exempt finishing unit, or to any of these options via an “exempt” market (i.e. one approved to hold sales of cattle eligible for pre movement testing but which have not been tested). Defra have backed down from an earlier proposal that exempt sale markets could not be held on the same day as ordinary markets, but only if the sales are formally approved and the cattle must be physically separated in some way or the sales held at different times of day. Vets will need to issue a group certificate that cattle which have been tested are clear and these will be valid for 60 days. The NFU and the Livestock Auctioneers Association have launched a legal challenge, applying for a Judicial Review over the government’s handling of the Bovine TB Order, on the grounds that there was inadequate consultation and preparation before the Order was implemented.

Supermarkets in the spotlight

The All-Party Parliamentary group for Small Shops has published a report “*High Street Britain 2015*” warning that small and independent retailers are being squeezed out because of the large multiples. They advocate a moratorium on further mergers and takeovers until the government has brought forward proposals to secure the diversity and vitality of the retail sector, and the introduction of comprehensive codes of practice across the sector, together with an independent retail regulator.

Avian Flu Update

Government officials and poultry industry representatives have advised that housing outdoor flocks is not required to date (end of February) despite the arrival of H5N1 in neighbouring countries. They do, however, urge a high level of vigilance amongst flock-keepers and good bio-security. In contrast, Denmark houses all flocks of more than 100, and Holland houses all birds. In EU countries affected by avian flu 3km “protection zones” have been instigated around each outbreak. Within these zones poultry must be kept indoors, movement is banned unless direct to the slaughterhouse, and no meat may be despatched outside the zone. Beyond this a 10km “surveillance zone” operates within which farm bio-security is enhanced and no hunting of wild birds is allowed.

Single Farm Payment Rates published

England operates a different SFP policy from Wales and Scotland (see previous briefings), differentiating between three types of land: Lowland, Severely Disadvantaged Areas and Moorland. The rate of SFP is different for each and these have finally been published and letters should be sent to English farmers announcing the rates by the end of February. Under the English system these will form 10% of the total SFP payments in year one of the scheme, the rest will be based on historical payments, though by 2012 the area payment will form 100% of the total payment.

However, the payments throughout the UK will be scaled back by just over 4% to fund the “national reserve” (the money that is available to deal with any anomalies in the system, e.g. those who didn’t otherwise qualify for SFP, people who bought land after the qualifying period etc.). When taken together with the money that has been scaled back under “modulation” (to pay for agri-environmental and rural development schemes), farmers face a total scale back of between 9-11%. Publication of these figures occurs at a time that the industry is expressing its concern over the budget proposals agreed under the British Presidency in 2005. The deal allows member states to apply voluntary modulation of up to 20%, but this does not have to be matched funded by the individual government. The fear is that other countries will match fund any modulated money, whilst the UK government will not, thereby putting UK farmers at a disadvantage. The published rates are:

Lowland	£19.23/ha	(£7.78/acre)
Severely Disadvantaged Areas	£16.08/ha	(£6.51/acre)
Moorland	£2.29/ha	(£0.93/acre)

Farm Income Figures

The latest farm income figures from the National Audit Office show that the Net Farm Income (the return to the farmer after paid family labour) is expected to be £17,500 in real terms for 2005, compared with £17,900 in 2004, a drop of 2.2%. These figures include the value of the SFP although no money was actually paid in 2005. The Total Income from Farming for the United Kingdom fell by 11.4% across the UK during 2005 to £2.52bn.

World Trade Organisation rules on GM crops

The WTO has ruled that the EU was wrong to impose a moratorium on approving GM crops for use within the EU between 1999 and 2004, and that individual Member States should not impose national bans on GM crops. This is largely a historical comment as the EU has since changed its regulatory framework and has resumed approvals.

Churchyards conference

Advance Notice – Caring for God’s Acre is hosting the first national conference on churchyards, in the Assembly Rooms Ludlow on 23rd and 24th May 2006. The cost is £125 (concessions for charitable and voluntary organisations). The keynote speaker will be David Bellamy, but the conference will also include workshops and tutorials on the flora and fauna of churchyards, their archaeology, their spirituality, the law relating to their use, how to organise community groups etc. Further details from caring for God’s Acre. Tel: 01568 611 154; www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk

I hope this helps!

Mick Pend