

## The Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life, Hereford Diocese

The Rev'd Nick Read OBE ARAgS

The Rectory, Pembridge, Hereford HR6 9EB

Mobile: 07973 361 055

e-mail: [agchap@btinternet.com](mailto:agchap@btinternet.com)

**Dear Colleague,**

### **August 2006 Agricultural Briefing**

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

#### **Defra announces results of badger cull survey**

As one of the options to try and control the spread of bovine TB, defra consulted the general public over whether or not badgers should be culled. Predictably, 95% of responses were against a cull, though "citizens panels", drawing on delegates from three major cities, were marginally in favour of culling provided it was part of a wider strategy to tackle the disease. The panels also believed that farmers should take responsibility for better biosecurity and that there should be continuing research into TB testing and vaccination. Defra's position on culling has not yet been revealed. The survey results coincide with the publication of an inexplicable fall in the number of TB cases. Until 30<sup>th</sup> April 2006 there were 1238 new cases, compared to 1699 for the same period in 2005 (a 27% reduction), and the number of slaughtered cattle fell 35% from 12,247 to 7,952. However, defra has indicated it is too early to say whether this is a temporary or a sustained reduction.

#### **Milliband raises farming profile**

David Milliband, the new Secretary of State at defra, has indicated that his priorities include developing a profitable and competitive domestic farming industry and securing further reform of the CAP. He made his first major speech on agriculture at the Royal Show and advocated a partnership between UK farmers and the government. His overall vision was contained in the phrase "one planet farming" which minimises the impact of food production on the environment and maximises the contribution to renewal of the natural environment. Defra will shortly update its action plan for delivering the Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy, which was developed after the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001, and which will be an opportunity to see how this vision is translated into practicable targets.

#### **Consumers' ethical concerns and dilemmas**

A report launched at the Royal Show, called "*Differentiation – A Sustainable Future for UK Agriculture*", reported research conducted amongst consumers. Whilst 81% would like to see a reduction in food miles, 75% believed that individual purchasing decisions would not have any impact and 58% based their purchasing on the lowest price. Only 25% considered the country of origin of produce they bought. The report comments that retailers themselves must accept some of the responsibility for people's buying patterns and should do more to convey information about farming and the provenance of the products they sell.

#### **Rural crime increasing in England**

The NFU Mutual's annual crime survey puts the estimated cost of farm-related rural crime in the UK in 2005 as £15.6 million, slightly up on the 2004 figure of £15.5 million. The cost of tractor and quad bike theft in England rose by 23%, and that of tools and equipment by 13%. This contrasts with a reduction in value of 66% for equipment theft in Scotland and 50% for tractor theft in Wales.

### **CPRE puts a figure on farmers' contribution to conservation**

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has published a report, "*Living Landscapes*" which included a survey of NFU members and which assesses the contribution that farmers make to conservation, which is not otherwise paid for by government grants, at £412 million. This equates to £2,410 per year for the average English farm. The report assesses that if farming support was abolished, conservation would decline and there would be an appreciable effect on the English landscape.

### **Local Food Campaign Gathers Momentum**

The *Farmers Weekly* Local Food Campaign continues to generate interest. The National Trust has recently announced a food sourcing and supply policy as a pilot scheme on 13 of its properties in England and Wales to prioritise locally grown food for sale in the Trust's outlets. The converse award offered by *Farmers Weekly*, the Limp lettuce Award, this week went to Waitrose *FIJI Water* which comes from Fiji in the South Pacific, a trip of 10,119 miles to bring to British diners. More details about the campaign are available on [fwi.co.uk](http://fwi.co.uk)

### **Anglicans press the Minister over 2007 Single Farm Payments**

The Bishop of Exeter, speaking in the House of Lords, asked whether the government would make partial payments in 2006-7 of the Single Farm Payment (SFP) in order to avoid recreating the hardship that has occurred in the current year. In response, Lord Rooker indicated that an immediate answer to this question would not be forthcoming and that a decision would only be made in October.

### **Centenary of the National Union of Agricultural Workers – remembering a Methodist Hero**

One hundred years ago George Edwards started the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers Union, which eventually spread nationwide as the National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers Union. Earlier attempts to set up workers' unions in the 1870s had collapsed in the face of the agricultural depression following the repeal of the Corn Laws. George was born in Marsham, Norfolk, in 1850, the youngest of seven children. His upbringing included a spell in the Aylsham workhouse and some rough living before being converted to Primitive Methodism. In 1872 he married Charlotte Corke who taught George to read and write and encouraged him to become a Methodist Lay Preacher. When aged 70 George was elected to Parliament as the Labour MP for South Norfolk, was subsequently awarded the OBE and became the first farm worker to be knighted. He died in 1933 aged 83.

### **Decision on agricultural levy boards**

Existing agricultural and horticultural levy boards are to be abolished and replaced by six sector-specific companies, which will report to an overseeing levy board (referred to as Levy Boards UK), by April 2008. Levy Boards UK will assume responsibility for collecting and distributing the levies, for identifying common themes for research and for monitoring to ensure that research undertaken reflects the needs of the levy payers. Farmers will have the right to vote on any new proposed levy and to vote on the abolition of a levy or sector company, putting some of the power back into producers' hands.

I hope this helps!

***Nick Read***