

Diocese of Hereford, Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life
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Dear Colleague

April Briefing

A few notes which I hope may be helpful in your conversations with farmers.

Avian flue update

Final restrictions on the poultry units affected by avian flu at the Bernard Matthews site in Suffolk have been lifted.

Funding update

Modulation is the jargon word that means taking money out of the budget for single farm payments (SFP), and using the money instead to fund the wider agri-environment schemes that operate under the Common Agricultural Policy. Modulation rates across Europe are currently set at 5%. "Voluntary modulation" means that each member government can set its own preferred rate of modulation (i.e. it is "voluntary" to the Member State - individual farmers have no choice about having money deducted from their SFP entitlement), up to a maximum of 20%. Europe as a whole does not like voluntary modulation because it means that member states operate different funding regimes, distorting the market, though the UK and Portuguese governments want to use voluntary modulation to boost the amount of money they can put into environmental schemes. The German Presidency has proposed a compromise agreement whereby the UK and Portugal only can use the mechanism, but not to the full rate of 20% that was originally envisaged. If acceptable to the European Parliament this will enable funding for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) to be finalized shortly.

RDPE has replaced the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), which funded grant schemes such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme, Processing and Marketing Grants, Countryside Stewardship Schemes etc. ERDP was administered by the Rural Development Service of Defra, however the RDPE will be split between Natural England, dealing primarily with environmental issues, and the Regional Development Agencies, dealing primarily with socio-economic issues. The eight English regions have each developed a Regional Implementation Plan (RIP) to establish the priorities for funding within each region. There are three broad themes to the funding

- Improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
- Improving the environment and countryside
- Diversification of the rural economy and rural quality of life

There are signs that the UK Treasury will be prepared to invest co-funding into the environmental aspects of rural development. At one stage the NFU predicted a £300m shortfall in environmental funding.

NFU Countryside survey

A poll by “NFU Countryside” – the part of the NFU that deals with landowners who are not farmers e.g. hobby farmers – of 4000 people in rural communities suggests that nearly 90% of respondents have a “positive” or a “very positive” view of the contribution that farmers make to the countryside. 80% of those questioned believe that farmers should be paid for the environmental measures they undertake, such as maintaining hedgerows. Whilst people value the countryside there were concerns about declining services, especially the future of post offices, local shops and local policing. However, less than 15% of those questioned regularly bought the bulk of their produce from the local shop; 58% use local supermarkets and 25% use an out of town supermarket.

Dairy prices rise

Tesco has announced an increase in the retail price of milk by 2p/pint on small packs and 1p/pint on large packs, and that it will pass the price rise back to the farmer. The price is believed to equate to 1.3p/litre at the retail level and 1p/litre will be passed back to the farmer through Tesco’s two liquid milk suppliers, Arla Foods UK and Robert Wiseman Dairies. It is hoped by the industry that other retailers will follow suit.

Pilot scheme on access to spraying records

Public concerns have been growing about the use of pesticides, and the effects these have on human health. A Royal Commission report, known as the Bystanders report after its title “Crop Spraying and the Health of Residents and Bystanders”, recommended that the public should be able to find out what pesticides are being sprayed near to their homes. A pilot project, due to end on 31st August, in a designated area of the Midlands gives members of the public the right to request spraying records from the farms within the designated zone. The map of the zone is available on the website of the Pesticides Safety Directorate www.pesticides.gov.uk.

2007 claim to the Agricultural Wages Board

Agriculture is the only industry that still operates a “Wages Board” which sets statutory minimum rates of pay for those employed. Negotiations for this year’s wage rates take place on 15th-17th May and the Transport and General Workers Union is asking for a 6% increase across all grades of worker, and the introduction of a pension scheme. The employers are suggesting that the rate set by the Chancellor for Public Sector Workers (c2.5%) is more realistic. The new rates are due to come into affect on 1st October.

Resources for You

If you are considering a Rogationtide Service at the beginning of May, take a look at the Arthur Rank Centre website www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk, for ideas about liturgical material. Many will be familiar with their booklet, published in the 1980s, but the website contains new ideas on this and many other rural themes.

I hope this is helpful,

Nick Read