

## **Diocese of Hereford, Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life**

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**Dear Colleague**

### **June Briefing**

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

#### **Dairy farming update**

The NFU and the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers have produced a guide to the current state of the dairy industry, entitled "British Milk – What Price 2007?" (available on the NFU website [www.nfuonline.com](http://www.nfuonline.com)). It shows that the average cost of milk production in 2006/7 was 21.32p per litre, whilst the average price to the farmer was 17.9p per litre. The input costs (labour, energy, feed) all rose, and collectively the price of milk production rose by 16% between 2002/3 and 2006/7. In response to a recent Parliamentary Question posed by the shadow agriculture minister, Jim Paise, defra indicated that 2125 dairy farmers had left the industry in England over the last four years, more than one per day.

#### **Badger population increases**

Recent surveys of the badger population by defra, carried out in the spring and autumn of 2006, show a steady increase in badger numbers in the areas worst affected by bovine tuberculosis, the south west and west Midlands. Surveys in the 1980s showed a population density of 3.34/sq km, rising to 4.12/sq km in the 1990s and the 2006 figures are 4.5/sq km.

#### **Poultry welfare standards raised**

A new EU Directive introduces maximum stocking densities for chickens reared for meat production (broilers) of 33kg/sq m of live birds, effective from June 2010. Higher stocking levels are permitted if the broiler houses have welfare measures such as ventilation systems and temperature and humidity controls. There must also be minimum periods of darkness within the units to allow the birds to rest. Whilst broadly welcoming the standards it is felt that it will make little difference to UK producers who already operate under various farm assurance schemes.

#### **Bad start to lamb prices**

Many farmers who "finish" lambs for the market have suffered from poor spring prices due primarily to an increase in imports from New Zealand and a drop in demand for British lamb from the French. Last year exports were higher because of the scare from avian influenza in France causing a surge in lamb sales. The French market accounts for 20% of British lamb sales.

#### **Defra fined**

Defra has been fined 54m euros (£36m) for making late payments under the old IACS schemes (one of the schemes that pre-dated the Single Farm Payment). The UK is one of 14 member states being penalized by the EU, of which Spain has received the largest penalty of 61m euros (£41m). These fines are not connected with the continuing row over the delays to the Single Farm Payments.

### **Consumer surveys**

Research by the food and grocery specialists IGD suggest that there is a rise in commitment from consumers to buy food that has been produced to high standards of welfare and sustainable production methods. In 2006 “healthy eating” was a dominant trend whereas in 2007 ethics and sustainability are topping consumer demands. IGD has also highlighted the growing importance of premium products to supermarket retailers. In 2006 UK shoppers spent £13bn on premium products (such as organic foods, Fair Trade, locally sourced, specialist or fine foods) and this is predicted to rise to over £19bn by 2011. Even within traditional markets premium foods are rising, for example sales of top quality bacon grew by 14% in 2006 in spite of generally static figures for the meat industry as whole.

### **Open Farm Sunday**

This year, Open Farm Sunday is on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June. It is a UK-wide campaign run by the organization LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and it is anticipated that 500 farms will take part. For further information and a list of participating farms contact LEAF at [www.farmsunday.org](http://www.farmsunday.org) or by telephone (02476 413 911). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is running a vote, as part of the initiative, to find the UK’s favourite farmland bird. For further details see [www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming).

### **GM crops update**

A report by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) has recommended that the government changes the way it assesses the impact of genetically modified (GM) crops. To date, when a Regulatory Impact Assessment, is conducted prior to a GM crop being allowed to be grown, the assessment only considers any negative impact that might arise as a result of replacing a non-GM crop with a GM variant (this is in accordance with an EU Directive). ACRE is suggesting the assessment should also consider any positive benefits that the GM crop might make to the environment. One of the cases being made is that the environmental impact might be more detrimental when using different conventional crops (e.g. replacing maize by oilseed rape) than between a non-GM and a GM crop, though the regulations do not allow this comparison to be made as part of the assessment.

### **The Year of Food and Farming**

A new campaign is being launched in September to stimulate children into thinking more about where their food comes from. Called “the Year of Food and Farming” a website is being established that will help make connections between farmers and schools to enable more coordinated activities. Schoolteachers who register will receive e-mail updates and have access to educational resources. By September a map should be available that can link local schools to local farmers who are available to participate in programmed events. The website address is [www.yearoffoodandfarming.org.uk](http://www.yearoffoodandfarming.org.uk)

I hope this is helpful,

***Nick Read***