

# Diocese of Hereford Agriculture & Rural Life

Serving the Church of England in Herefordshire,  
South Shropshire & parts of Powys & Worcestershire



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

Dear Colleague

## March Briefing 2008

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

### Welsh aid following English Foot and Mouth.

The restrictions imposed as a result of the localised outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in England last year also impacted on Welsh farmers. The Welsh Assembly Government, subject to confirmation from the European Union, has made an additional £8.8m available as a compensation package to be added to the £3.17m targeted at the "light lamb disposal scheme" and £1m to promote sales of Welsh lamb and beef. Delegations from farming unions in Wales and Scotland handed in a petition calling for compensation following the outbreak of FMD as a result of the contamination from the government's Pirbright laboratory last year. The restrictions imposed severely affected autumn sales and the aid made available from the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government represents only a fraction of the losses incurred.

### Decision expected on badgers

The Secretary of State at DEFRA announced at the NFU's Centenary Conference in February that he would be making a decision about bovine TB and badger culling, and hinted strongly that it would be soon after he received the report from the EFRA Select Committee which was studying the issue. The report is expected by early March. He will base his conclusions on four tests: what does the science tell us?; what impact would the proposed measures have on the disease?; how practical is the proposed solution?; and, what will be its public acceptability?

The announcement will be made at a time when bovine TB statistics show a rapidly worsening situation. The incidence of bovine TB rose by 17% during 2007 whilst the number of animals slaughtered rose by 26% to 29,015 and the number of holdings under TB restrictions rose by 18% to 7,364. A report published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society investigated the role that cattle movements have made in the spread of bovine TB. The analysis suggests that cattle movements are directly responsible for 16% of herd infections, whilst 75% are attributable to "local effects" with specific reference to badgers as the main wildlife reservoir.

### Bluetongue update

The bluetongue surveillance zone has gradually extended across the country over the winter months. By mid February, 80 premises in England had been confirmed with bluetongue virus, the majority being detected by pre-movement testing. Bluetongue had also been detected in Northern Ireland for the first time, in a dairy cow imported from the Netherlands. The Welsh livestock industry is requesting that farmers voluntarily stop importing animals from bluetongue infected areas, following the discovery of bluetongue infected Texels imported from Holland to Llandyssul in West Wales.

Livestock farmers continue to be worried about the expected cost of the bluetongue vaccine, which is expected to cost £19m, or an average of £330 per livestock farm. The government has concluded that applying for co-funding from Europe is unlikely to be cost effective even though it is available for the first year of the scheme. The vaccination programme is likely to be voluntary, as a statutory programme would be even more expensive due to monitoring and enforcement costs. When daytime temperatures reach an average of 14 degrees C the midges that spread the disease will be mobile, and the vector-free period will come to an end. At this point movement controls in infected areas will become even more strict than at present.

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### **Competition Commission reports on supermarkets**

The Competition Commission has recommended a major overhaul of the supermarket code of practice and the creation of a supermarket ombudsman to prevent supply chain abuses. The report, published on 15<sup>th</sup> February, has been welcomed by the farming industry though the retail sector has suggested that the extension of bureaucracy would be detrimental for consumers. The strengthened code of practice would be known as the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) and would prevent retailers with a turnover greater than £1bn from making retrospective changes to agreed terms of supply. The report also recommends the appointment of a code compliance officer by individual retailers to improve dealings with suppliers. The ombudsman role would be to arbitrate in disputes about the GSCOP.

### **Rural Advocate's Report**

Dr Stuart Burgess, the "Rural Advocate" published his second report in March 2008 outlining some of the key issues affecting rural England. The report identifies 928,000 households in rural England which are below the government's official poverty threshold of £16,492 household income pa. However, because they are geographically dispersed they fail to be recognised in many official statistics. It also highlights the lack of affordable housing and the demographic changes taking place in the countryside, coupled with the continuing pressures on farming. Further details are available from [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)

### **"Save our bacon"**

The British pig farming industry and Waitrose has launched a national campaign to draw attention to the plight of pig farming and to solicit support for the sector. The campaign consists of an online petition which is intended to put pressure on retailers so that some of the increased cost of food is passed back to the producer. The petition can be signed at [www.britishpigsareworthit.com](http://www.britishpigsareworthit.com), and there is further background information available. Feed prices account for 60% of rearing costs and these have risen by more than 100% in the last twelve months. Most producers are estimated to be losing an average of £26 a pig and many are predicted to leave the sector altogether, even though the sector has already seen a 40% decline over the previous decade.

Figures produced by an agricultural buying group in East Anglia suggest that input costs across all sectors rose by more than 7% last year, with the dairy sector being hit hardest (9% rise in costs), followed by potatoes. A 2p per litre rise in fuel duty is due to come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and various business and farming organisations are asking for this to be cancelled.

### **Local event – South Shropshire**

Farmers who are interested in working with local schools to become part of the supply chain for school meals are invited to a meeting at Craven Arms Community Centre from 11.00am to 3.30pm on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March. This is part of a national "Walk the Supply Chain Initiative". For further information contact Warren Landles on 01588 674099.

### **Hope for us all**

Research from the NFU Mutual coinciding with Valentine's Day reveals that almost three times as many men and women aged over 45 favour a country type to a city dweller. Form an orderly queue!

Best wishes,

**Nick Read**