

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

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Dear Colleague,

### **December 2005 Agricultural Briefing**

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

#### **Reform of the agricultural levy bodies**

Nine major agricultural levy bodies exist which help to fund research and development and marketing for various agricultural commodities. These organisations include the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC), the Home Grown Cereals Authority (HGCA) and the Milk Development Council (MDC). Collectively they raise £54 million through levies on the commodities produced by the farmers. A recent consultation advocates that the organisations should be reformed to allow greater producer participation at Board level and the formation of a new umbrella organisation that can oversee their operations and set the individual rates of levy collection. The consultation document is available on the web at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk).

#### **Confusion over set-aside rates**

Set aside is a policy tool whereby land is "set aside" from production in order to control the amount of grain etc. produced by the European Community. The set aside calculation for 2006 is causing some confusion and has prompted new guidance to be issued by the Rural Payments Agency. The basic requirement is that farmers have the same number of hectares in set aside for 2006 as they did for 2005, even if the amount of arable land has changed. Thus a farmer who had 100 ha of eligible land in 2005 would have been required to set aside 8% (8 ha). Even if they only farm 50 ha of eligible land in 2006, or have increased the area to 150 ha of eligible land, they will still be required to set aside 8 ha.

#### **Mixed messages - TB update**

A literature review of world research on bovine TB, conducted by Reading University, has concluded that a cull of badgers would do little to halt the spread of bovine TB in the UK. Whilst there is strong evidence that badgers can provide a reservoir for infection, culling badgers appears to have limited effect on the incidence of bovine TB. The research supports measures to reduce cattle-to-cattle spread. However, it is believed that defra are working towards proposals to consult on renewing badger culling as a means of helping to control bovine TB. The latest statistics demonstrate that the problem continues to grow. During September 2,253 cattle were slaughtered, an increase of 10.6% over August, and the number of cattle slaughtered so far in 2005 is 35% higher than in the same ten-month period in 2004.

#### **Potential boost for biofuels**

The UK government has set a target – the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation - that 5% of fuel sold from petrol stations should come from a renewable resource by 2010. This is predicted to save about 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions (equivalent to taking 1 million cars off the road). However, there are concerns from environmentalists that biofuel production could be at the expense of wildlife. Although the objective has received widespread support it falls short of the European target of 8% of renewable fuels by volume, equivalent to 5.75% by energy. There are also key decisions to be taken concerning the duty levied on biofuels and the long term targets that might apply before people are likely to invest heavily in the new technologies.

