

The Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life, Hereford Diocese

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Dear Colleague,

May 2006 Agricultural Briefing

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

SFP update

There is still considerable delay over the payment of the Single Farm Payment (SFP) to farmers in England the economic and social impacts that this is having on the industry. By 11th April fewer than 40% of English farmers had been paid. Calls to the various farming support networks are reported to have increased as a result. The following helpline numbers may be useful, RSIN offers advice and guidance, FCN is able to offer practical help and emotional support (but only operates in certain parts of the country) and RABI offers advice on welfare and grants to support farming families.

Rural Stress Information Network	(RSIN)	02476 412 916
Farm Crisis Network	(FCN)	07002 326 326
Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution	(RABI)	01865 727 888

Avian Flu update

To date (April 20th) there have been no further cases of Avian Flu reported in the UK though people are asked to remain vigilant. The latest advice from Defra indicates that there is considerable variation in the clinical signs and the severity of the disease but typical symptoms (in poultry) include: swelling of the head, bluish discolouration of the comb and wattles, dullness, lack of appetite, respiratory distress, diarrhoea, a drop in egg production and/or the death of birds without any apparent signs of disease. Any flocks suspected of having avian flu should be isolated, all movement of poultry, hatching eggs, equipment and personnel should stop and the local Animal Health Office should be contacted. Vehicles entering and leaving, and all equipment, should be disinfected. The advice also urges poultry keepers to limit access to visitors, though private individuals do not have the right to close footpaths and bridleways.

There is a continuing dialogue with Europe concerning compensation if avian flu becomes more widespread. Normally compensation would only be payable for healthy birds that are slaughtered under government instructions as part of a disease control programme based on the market value at the time of the cull. However the European Commission has been discussing compensation for loss in income associated with a downturn in demand for poultry, following an initial drop in consumption of 70% in Italy and 30% in France following the outbreak of avian flu in those countries.

New agricultural waste regulations

Agricultural waste regulations come in to force on May 15th which will bring waste disposal on farms into line with that of other industries. Amongst the practical issues the regulations raise are that farmers will no longer be able to use a farm tip without a licence and strict rules will be imposed to govern the burning of synthetic waste products, such as plastics. Instead of burning or burying, farmers will be expected to take waste to a licensed site, or get an authorised contractor to remove it for them.

Food labelling under the spotlight

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has proposed that food should be labelled with red, amber or green symbols to indicate the amount of salt, fat and calories they contain. Red would indicate high levels and green would indicate low. However some of the leading retailers have already rejected the FSA recommendations saying that the proposals are too simplistic and would ultimately mislead, rather than inform, the consumer. The “traffic light” scheme is being targeted at breakfast cereals, ready meals, sausages, pies, burgers, pizzas and sandwiches.

Tenancy law under review

Changes to the Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) have been introduced to the Parliamentary process which would enable tenants to diversify without losing AHA protection. The Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) includes many recommendations suggested by the cross-industry Tenancy Reform Industry Group (TRIG) formed in 2002. The RRO would also put a cap on compensation for any improvements made by a tenant at the end of a tenancy, so that landlords are not exposed to open-ended claims, but tenants will be able to add land or buildings to an existing tenancy. It is expected that the RRO will become law by the Autumn.

Beef exports to Europe to recommence

Beef exports to Europe will officially recommence on May 3rd (see previous briefings), bringing to an end a ban imposed in 1996 to ensure that BSE did not spread into the human population.

Farm Sunday

11th June has been designated as “Farm Sunday” when farmers are encouraged to open their farms to the general public and explain what they are doing. The idea is being organised via the LEAF initiative (Linking Environment and Farming), which has a number of LEAF registered farms in each county, and which drew its inspiration from a national event that has run for five years in Denmark and which last year attracted 44,000 visitors. The open days can be extremely modest (a small farm walk) or more ambitious. Details and an information pack are available from www.leafuk.org or by contacting 02476 413 911. It might also be an opportunity for a church congregation and local farmers to do a combined venture.

Churchyards conference

Final Notice – Caring for God’s Acre is hosting the first national conference on churchyards, in the Assembly Rooms Ludlow on 23rd and 24th May 2006. The cost is £125 for businesses and statutory agencies and £75 for charities and voluntary organisations. The keynote speaker will be David Bellamy, but the conference will also include workshops and tutorials on the flora and fauna of churchyards, their archaeology, their spirituality, the law relating to their use, how to organise community groups etc. It is possible to go for one out of the two days - further details from Caring for God’s Acre. Tel: 01568 611 154; www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk

I hope this helps!

Nick Read