

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

## **July Briefing**

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

### **TB report published**

The long-awaited final report from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB, following ten years of research, has been published. It concludes that whilst badgers make a significant contribution to TB in cattle in high-risk areas it would require their virtual elimination to make a significant contribution to tackling TB. However it questions the social and practical hurdles in achieving this and whether it would be cost-effective. Instead it recommends tougher controls to prevent cattle-to-cattle spread and movement restrictions to reduce trade between high and low risk areas. The report rules out the idea that farmers could take responsibility for culling badgers themselves, claiming that a piecemeal approach would amplify disease levels. The industry and a number of vets have condemned the report's findings and some have suggested that the culling trials themselves were methodologically unsound. The government's response is awaited.

### **Open Farm Sunday**

Open Farm Sunday (see previous briefings) was considered to be very successful; more than 150,000 visitors used the opportunity to visit a participating farm.

### **Dairy news - Marks & Spencer milk prices**

M&S are introducing higher payments to its milk suppliers who display the best welfare and environmental standards. Under its "Price Pledge" farmers are paid according to a formula, recalculated every six months, which takes into account dairy commodity prices, and fertiliser, energy and feed values, together with a bonus scheme for environmental, welfare and social factors. The new bonus will be weighted 70% towards animal welfare, 20% towards the environment and 10% towards social activities. These might include hosting school visits, having a whole-farm plan and achieving the Entry Level Scheme (for environmental stewardship).

### **Dairy news – Tesco 'localchoice' Milk**

TV and newspaper adverts are promoting a premium milk brand, 'localchoice' milk on behalf of Tesco. It seeks to promote milk sourced locally to the store. However some farmer groups are concerned that the adverts are potentially misleading and that the local sourcing is 'local' to the processing facility rather than the retailer. At the moment 126 producers have contracts in 15 English and Welsh counties under the new scheme. It is expected that the scheme will increase in popularity as the advertising begins to pay dividends, and that more farmers will be included in the contracts.

### **Whither Food miles?**

The term food miles is widely used, conveying the idea that it is good to cut down on the distances that food is transported in order to reduce the carbon footprint and adverse environmental effects. However a recent conference highlighted that “food miles” is too simplistic and that a more meaningful way of communicating about sustainable production is needed. The suggestion is to develop a suite of indicators including: the shopping and delivery distances traveled, the contribution made to the economy locally (whether at home or, for example, in developing countries), and to assess whether the methods of production used are environmentally friendly. It has been claimed, for example, that New Zealand lamb and dairy produce consumed in the UK are more environmentally friendly, in spite of the long travel distances involved, than UK produced products.

### **Single Farm Payment update**

“Modulation” is the mechanism which takes money from directly supporting production (the Single Farm Payment), in order to be used for agri-environmental schemes. 5% modulation is compulsory across the EU, but member states may also apply a “voluntary” top up. In England the modulation rate will be 19% by 2012, the highest in the EU, whilst in Wales it will rise to 11.5% (for comparison in Scotland and Northern Ireland it will be 14%). In Europe as a whole agreement has been reached to bring fruit, vegetable and potato (FVP) growers into line with the rest of agriculture and into the Single Farm Payment system by 2008. At the moment aid to the sector has to be targeted largely through producer organizations.

### **Government claws back from research funding**

Agricultural levy boards were able to take a percentage of the price paid for certain commodities in order to fund research, development and promotion activities. These were recently restructured into a single umbrella organization, Levy Board UK. However the Treasury has announced that the new body, which spans cereals, oilseeds, potatoes, meat, milk and vegetables, must pay VAT and Corporation Tax. The effect of this is that approximately £6m of the organisation’s £58m turnover will be paid as tax rather than spent on R&D and promotion. A campaign is underway to reverse the decision.

### **Food inspection regime**

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for overseeing the quality control of food in the UK and it has recently announced that farms which belong to a recognized assurance scheme will be inspected less than non-assured producers. This will shift the focus of food hygiene inspections to higher risk premises and could benefit more than 100,000 farms. Only 2% of assured farms will face statutory inspections compared to 20% of non-assured farms.

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

A further reminder that a new website is being launched in September to make connections between farmers and schools. Schoolteachers who register will receive e-mail updates and have access to educational resources, the website address is [www.yearoffoodandfarming.org.uk](http://www.yearoffoodandfarming.org.uk)

I hope this is helpful,

***Nick Read***