

# 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**

**August 2008**

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

## **Bovine TB**

The long-awaited decision on combating bovine TB amounted to a decision to do very little as the government refused to sanction a cull of badgers, a decision criticised by the former Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir David King. In a decision announced on July 7<sup>th</sup> Hilary Benn opted instead to invest £20m over three years to develop a TB vaccine and to create a TB Partnership Group with the industry to recommend how the TB budget should be spent, to propose measures to help tackle the disease such as tighter cattle controls, to help decide how a vaccine would be used, and to help farmers who have to live under the TB restrictions. In response most farming organisations have refused to participate in the Partnership Group in protest at the lack of progress. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has expressed its disappointment at the government's response indicating that the government had failed to come up with a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the disease beyond surveillance, testing and slaughter.

Farmers are asking the European Union to press defra to reconsider its decision on a badger cull as MEPS suggest that the UK government is breaching European Law by not acting to eradicate bovine TB and representatives of the veterinary sector predict that a vaccination will not be effective until 2020 at the earliest. The NFU is preparing a legal challenge to the decision. In a separate case a High Court judge has ruled that the system of compensation imposed by defra for pedigree cattle slaughtered due to TB is unlawful. Defra moved from a case-by-case valuation to using an average values system of compensation, and a judge has ruled in a test case that this amounts to unfair discrimination against farmers with pedigree cattle which are of much higher value than the average values allowed for.

## **Nitrates update**

The EU Commission has forced the UK to change the way it implements the 1991 Nitrates Directive (see previous briefing) and as a result existing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) have been extended (increasing coverage from 55% to 68% of England), restricting the timing and quantity of slurry applications and requiring greater storage capacity for slurry on-farm (five months worth for cattle and sheep and six months for pigs and poultry). The additional cost to the industry is estimated at between £50-100m a year. Dairy farmers will have major challenges as they will face extended closed periods during which they will not be allowed to spread slurry.

## **Bluetongue update**

There is no longer a Bluetongue Surveillance Zone in England, instead the whole of the country has become a Protection Zone as the vaccine has become available. This should ease movement restrictions as animals may move within a protection zone. The Welsh Assembly Government is considering declaring the whole of Wales as a Protection Zone and abandoning the original idea of rolling out the vaccination over time, as in England. This would benefit the cross-border autumn sales between Wales and England.

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### **State of the Countryside Report for 2008**

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has published its annual State of the Countryside Report for England. This shows a continuing decline in the number of farm employees, down 39% from 1999 to 45,300 full-time farm workers, and down 7% to 353,061 if part-time workers are also considered. However new business start-ups in rural areas are growing proportionately faster than in urban areas, especially in information technology and financial sectors.

### **Defra consultation on sustainable food supply**

For the first time for many years food security is back on the agenda, and defra want to encourage discussion on the best way to ensure a sustainable food supply. A detailed food security policy is anticipated later in the year. Three broad areas are under consideration:

- Whether defra has correctly identified the challenges to food security
- Whether the government is taking the correct measures to address these
- What further role the food and drink sector can play in ensuring food security.

Further details are available on the defra website [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

The consultation follows the publication of a report on food policy by the Strategy Unit of the Cabinet Office called "Food Matters". This was the report that highlighted the considerable amount of food wasted (estimated at 4.1m tonnes equating to £420 worth per household per year) which prompted the Prime Minister to recommend that households do all they can to reduce food waste. The report downplays the need for self sufficiency, arguing that food security can still be achieved through the global food chain. It advocates the development of a Food Strategy Task Force to monitor the food chain.

### **Global warming response**

A report by Natural England concludes that farmers are aware of the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions though there has been an over-emphasis on tackling carbon dioxide emissions to the detriment of nitrous oxide and methane which are more significant contributors from farming processes. A toolkit, Carbon Accounting for Land Management (CALM), is available via the CLA website [www.cla.org.uk](http://www.cla.org.uk) Sainsburys has also launched a scheme to help dairy farmers measure their carbon footprint and reduce greenhouse gases by up to 10% through its Dairy Development Group. The company hope that the audit will act as a benchmark for the rest of the industry.

### **BSE testing**

There are discussions about raising the age at which cattle will need to be tested for BSE from 30 months to older animals, saving millions of pounds in costs. Scientific opinion from an Italian-based European Food Safety Authority suggests that raising the age for testing will pose a negligible risk to human health. Within the 15 Member States of the EU until recently (the EU-15) about 10m cattle had been tested, but the number of BSE cases had fallen from 2,164 in 2001 to 149 in 2007.

### **Consultation on CAP "Health Check"**

A further reminder that defra has launched a consultation on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (the "health check") – see earlier briefings. Details can be found at [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/cap-healthcheck](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/cap-healthcheck). The deadline for responses is the 1<sup>st</sup> September.

Best wishes,

**Nick Read**