

# 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,*

## May Briefing 2009

A few notes which I hope may be helpful in your dealings with farmers. Unfortunately due to insurmountable problems with my Acer laptop I was unable to produce an April briefing. Hopefully a different computer will prevent similar problems in future.

### **TB and animal health update**

A Devon farmer has launched a petition for those objecting to the government's refusal to cull badgers. It is found on <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/bTBinwildlife>.

The NFU is backing another Devon farmer, Mr Partridge, who is petitioning the House of Lords over TB compensation. Cattle slaughtered for TB used to be independently valued until Defra changed the English approach to a banded valuation system. This was felt to be unfair to owners of high value animals (such as pedigree herds) and the High Court ruled that Defra's approach was unlawful in July 2008. However, in March 2009 this was overturned by the Court of Appeal, hence the further legal application. The Welsh Assembly Government has recently issued a consultation document on TB which also raises the possibility of changing their (independent) valuation system. 12,000 cattle were slaughtered in Wales due to TB in 2008, a rise of 50% over 2007. Compensation rose by 47% in the same period to £23m and is expected to top £30m in 2009.

### **Set aside response**

The farming industry has launched a "Campaign for the Farmed Environment" as a response over the future of set-aside (see March briefing). Rather than face compulsory set-aside they want farmers to sign up for the Entry Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ELS), run by defra, which rewards farmers who farm in environmentally sensitive ways. However the industry also wants 2010 to be a "transition year" with the main progress being made after that. Environmentalists feel that this will be detrimental as many farmers are due to renew their ELS agreements in 2010 and momentum will be lost. The industry's proposals are found on [www.tinyurl.com/CamFarm](http://www.tinyurl.com/CamFarm)

### **Tesco profits prompts response**

Tesco's recently announced pre-tax profits of £3.13bn on a turnover of over £1bn a week has prompted further calls for a retailer ombudsman to oversee relations between the retailers and suppliers. The Competition Commission has launched a consultation on the subject. During April dairy farmers have seen further reductions in milk prices, with the price to the farmer ranging from 20-27p/litre and there is serious concern over the future "critical mass" of the UK dairy herd.

Recent figures released by Defra show the decline in the UK livestock industry generally:

	1997	2008	% change
Dairy herd	2.45m	1.91m	-22
Beef cattle	1.91m	1.67m	-13
Pig herd	7.83m	4.71m	-40
Sheep/lambs	43.98m	33.13m	-25

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### **The last “Royal Show”**

The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) has announced that the 2009 show will be the last Royal Show. Considered by many as a flagship for the industry, the Royal has been losing money in recent years and has become financially unsustainable. Specialist shows will continue to be hosted at the site.

### **Report on Biomass**

The Environment Agency has published a report, entitled *Biomass – carbon sink or carbon sinner*, which examines whether biomass will make a reduction in the carbon footprint. It concludes that the best biomass crops can deliver up to 98% fewer emissions than coal and save 3m tonnes of carbon dioxide a year by 2020, but only if grown and used under stringent conditions. Ploughing up permanent grassland and growing biomass using high inputs of nitrogen fertiliser, inappropriate processing into fuel pellets, and transporting these long distances to be burnt, would mitigate against any carbon reduction.

### **Latest organic figures**

A report published by the Soil Association suggests that the value of the organic sector has grown even though sales have declined. The organic market was worth £2.1bn in 2008, an increase of 1.7% over 2007, though this rise is below the rate of food inflation and reveals a fall in volume. The proportion of shoppers who look for organic food fell from 24% in 2008 to 19% earlier this year, though this is still higher than at any time before 2008.

### **Sheep identification**

The introduction of Electronic Identification (EID) of sheep is likely to cost the UK more than £65m, of which the bulk of the cost (92%) will be borne by farmers, according to a recent economic assessment. All animals will need to be tagged from 2010.

### **Defra consultation on Single Farm Payment**

In an effort to cut down on the number of applications for Single Farm Payment, especially from so-called “pony paddock” holders, Defra has launched a consultation on the minimum claim size permissible. Details are available on [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) until 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

### **Voluntary notification of pesticide spraying?**

The NFU is seeking the views of growers about using a voluntary approach to “prior notification” of spraying pesticides. A continuing legal case brought by a pesticides campaigner, Georgina Downs, resulted in a legal ruling that Defra had failed to carry out its duty to protect neighbours under existing European pesticide regulations when growers sprayed pesticides. Although the judge’s decision is being appealed against there are early signs that the guidance for sprayers will be changed. The NFU has sought to pre-empt any legal changes by suggesting a voluntary approach. However, early responses to the idea are pointing out some of the practical difficulties involved with texting or ‘phoning neighbours prior to spraying taking place.

### **Response to swine flu**

Although there is no evidence whatever that swine flu can be caught by eating pork several countries have erected trade barriers and prices for pork have fallen. Imports of live pigs from Mexico and the USA had been banned in Russia, China, Indonesia, Serbia and Ecuador by the end of April. In the UK there had been no discernible reaction to sales of pigmeat though there was evidence that some European countries had seen a dip in demand.

I hope this helps,

**Nick Read**