

# 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*

## July Briefing 2009

A few notes which I hope might be helpful in your dealings with farmers.

### **Dairy update**

*Dairy Farmers of Britain* (DFoB) was a farmer-owned co-operative that filed for bankruptcy in June. Of the 1800 farmer members all but 200 found alternative buyers for their milk within a few weeks but the remaining farmers (usually small and remote dairy units) presented a problem for the receivers though a contract with *Milk Link* is being negotiated. Financial help has also been made available through the RABI farming charity (emergency helpline 01865 727 888). However the cash-flow repercussions lead to speculation that more farmers will quit the sector anyway and the industry has asked government for more time to comply with anti-pollution rules that require substantial capital investment. In the longer term, a recent consultant's report on the sector offers some hope, suggesting that milk prices might begin to improve in 2010.

The Conservative Party is to hold a Dairy Summit in the House of Commons on 17<sup>th</sup> July to discuss how the industry can go forward after the collapse of DFoB, with falling milk prices and reduced numbers of farmers.

### **TB update**

The pedigree livestock farmer from Devon who wished to take Defra to judicial review over its compensation policy for cattle slaughtered due to TB (see previous briefings) has been refused permission to appeal to the House of Lords. Although he won the initial High Court case, the Court of Appeal overturned it and so the Appeal Court's decision will stand. However, the number of cattle slaughtered due to bovine TB has risen by almost 20% in the first three months of 2009, when over 12,000 cattle were slaughtered and 5,000 farms faced movement restrictions.

### **FWAG's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday pledge**

The Farm and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) celebrates 40 years this year and has asked farmers to respond by doing "one thing for wildlife" in 2009. The website<sup>4</sup> gives examples of what might be done and a list of pledges received will be forwarded to government at the end of the year to demonstrate farmers' commitment to the environment. See [www.fwag.org.uk/pledge](http://www.fwag.org.uk/pledge)

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### **Health & Safety Statistics and Advice**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report that farming related deaths fell from 46 in 2007 to 26 in 2008, though this still makes agriculture one of the most dangerous industries to work in and over the last 10 years 450 workers and members of the public have been killed on Britain's farms. 10 of the 26 recent deaths were employees, the others were self-employed farmers. HSE have published a free booklet to help raise awareness of the issue, available by phoning 0800 917 2868 and quoting FW04.

### **NFU consultation on spraying**

Whilst still awaiting the outcome of the legal case brought by Georgina Downs (see previous briefings) concerning protection of the public from agricultural sprays, the NFU has launched an online consultation of farmers. It especially wants to hear from those who already voluntarily notify neighbours to learn from their experience. See [www.NFUonline.com](http://www.NFUonline.com)

### **UK Climate projections report**

A report launched by Defra on the impact of climate change on UK farming predicts an increase in agricultural pests and diseases, more frequent extremes of weather (droughts, flooding and storm damage) and livestock exposed to heat stress. However crop yields are likely to increase. Summers are likely to be 2 degrees higher in southern England by 2040, with a 20% drop in summer rainfall, though winters are likely to be wetter and rainfall will rise in north-west England and Scotland.

### **Decline in county farms**

County council tenancies used to be a way in to the farming industry for new entrants, but between 2003 and 2007 the area of council owned farmland fell by 20%, leaving just under 100,000ha remaining. Although council smallholdings pre-date the first war it is the Agriculture Act 1970 which stipulates that local authorities, as statutory smallholding authorities, are to "make it their general aim to provide opportunities for persons to be farmers on their own account by letting holdings to them." However the need for councils to maximise their revenue often through sale of assets, the size of many smallholdings which are comparatively small and uneconomic as farming units, and the problems faced by tenants moving onto larger units as they progress in farming have all affected the ability of the system to attract new entrants.

However attracting new entrants is critical if the industry is to thrive. A recent report by the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) predicts that farming needs 60,000 new entrants over the next ten years and that it must compete actively with other employers if it is to attract these. It recommends that an industry-wide strategy be developed to tackle the perceived skills shortage.

I hope this is helpful,

*Nick*