

# 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 Briefing 2009

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

### **TB update**

Farms living with TB may benefit from more relaxed movement rules. Instead of cattle being bought into restricted herds requiring individual licences, farmers will be able to apply for a general licence which will remain in place for the duration of the TB restriction unless the disease status of the herd declines or the herd misses a TB test deadline. Farmers will also be able to move cattle from longer distances between restricted premises which will help them to source cattle for their herds. However the new licenses will be subject to veterinary risk assessments and will only apply in low risk situations.

The government plans to spend £10m on a TB vaccine for badgers coupled with a five year programme, starting in June 2010, of trapping and injecting badgers across six areas, each covering up to 100sq km (25,000 acres) in the south west and western England. Farmers will be asked to allow contractors onto their land so that badgers can be trapped, marked and vaccinated and the aim is to trap about 70% of badgers in each area. However the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the British Cattle Veterinary Association have issued a joint statement advocating the case for humane, targeted and managed culling of badgers in specific areas where they are regarded as significant contributors to the persistent presence of TB. The BVA suggests that the current government strategy for TB control is inadequate.

### **“Green” issues**

A Defra funded study entitled *Comparative Life Cycle Assessment of Food Commodities* has looked at the green credentials of home-grown compared to imported food. By comparing factors such as energy use, global warming potential, pesticides and land use for seven different foods it concludes that some imported produce may be more environmentally friendly than the equivalent home grown variety. Thus Spanish tomatoes may be better environmentally because the energy required to heat greenhouses in the UK is greater than the energy used in transporting the Spanish produce. The study, which is certain to generate further debate, was published on the defra website.

A study commissioned by the Food Standards Agency suggests that there is no intrinsic health or nutritional benefits from organic, compared to conventionally produced, food though the Soil Association has questioned the methodology used. The Soil Association has also been critical of environmentalists who state that cutting red meat consumption will

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combat climate change as “too simplistic.” Farming livestock as part of a mixed farming system is important to help combat climate change because long term pastureland helps to trap carbon.

The government has launched its “*Low Carbon Transition Plan*” to tackle climate change and wants farming to reduce emissions to 6% lower than the level predicted for 2020 through a voluntary, industry-led, approach. This should include more efficient use of fertiliser and better management of livestock and manure, more accurate monitoring of agricultural emissions, encouragement of private funding for woodland to increase carbon uptake, and support for anaerobic digestion. Farmers are able to calculate their carbon footprint using the Carbon Accounting for Land Management (CALM) calculator on the CLA website [www.calm.cla.org.uk](http://www.calm.cla.org.uk) Environmentalists have criticised the targeted reduction as too small.

### **Dairy sector update**

A report from the EU Commission on the dairy sector has criticised supermarkets for failing to pass on the fall in dairy commodity prices to their customers. The Commission’s figures show that since the end of 2007 wholesale butter prices fell by 39%, skimmed milk powder by 49%, cheese by 18% and milk by 31% yet the price paid by consumers fell by only 2%. The Commission has called for greater market transparency and fairer market distribution and is addressing anti-competitive practices within the sector.

The Commission also predicts further difficulties for the dairy sector with prices falling even lower in 2010. A research consultancy predicts an 8% reduction whilst the OECD predicts a fall of 2%. However in the longer term dairy values are expected to recover. Milk prices for the UK for May 2009 averaged 22.5p/litre, 8% less than the same period in 2008 and 18% less than the peak monthly price in October 2008. Prices in France are 18% lower than twelve months ago, Germany 24% and Ireland 30%.

The receivers for Dairy Farmers of Britain (DFoB) have stated that all farmers affected by the firm going into receivership on 3<sup>rd</sup> June have either found new buyers for their milk or retired from the sector. In total 1,813 farmers were affected, 1,758 found a new buyer and 55 quit the sector.

### **Sheep tagging update**

The Commission has agreed to a major concession which will reduce the costs involved with the Electronic Identification (EID) of sheep. The concessions mean that the animals’ electronic tags will be scanned at “critical control points”, such as markets or abattoirs, rather than on farms which means that farmers will not need to buy their own tag readers, with an estimated saving to the industry of up to £18m a year. However farming organisations are disappointed that in return for these concessions defra has agreed not to pursue any further substantive issues with the Commission relating to sheep EID.

I hope this is helpful,

*Nick*