

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

February Briefing 2010

A few notes which I hope might be helpful in your dealings with farmers. NB there was no briefing for January.

Dairy industry continues to suffer

Although an emergency fund has been allocated to help the dairy sector, many suggest that the €29m (£25.2m) available to UK farmers will have little effect. Defra has launched a consultation to decide how the money should be used. The allocation amounts to about £1600 per eligible farmer. The consultation ends on 17th February, see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/dairy-fund/index.htm>

Greenhouse gases

A new report, published jointly by WWF-UK and the Food Climate Research Network estimates that the food we eat accounts for 30% of the UK's carbon footprint. Previous estimates put the figure at 20% but these did not take account of land use changes overseas that affect the imported food we buy, mainly deforestation to create agricultural land. All stages of the UK food chain lead to emissions, from production and initial processing (34%), manufacturing, distribution, retail and cooking (26%), and agriculturally induced land use change (40%). The food industry must cut emissions by at least 70% by 2050 if it is to make its contribution towards restricting temperature rises to below 2 degrees.

New Commissioner-Designate for agriculture

The European Parliament votes for the new batch of 26 Commissioners on 9th February. The Commissioner-designate for Agriculture is Dacian Ciolos, a Romanian with agricultural experience on farms in France and Romania, a spell with the EU Commission in Brussels and as Romania's Minister of Agriculture. He has a French wife and is sometimes labelled "France's second Commissioner", but also speaks fluent English.

Rise in input costs

Nitrogen and compound prices have risen higher than expected, with domestic ammonium nitrate rising by £20 to £225/t, and phosphate prices have also risen by £150/t over the last two to three months. The bulk of the rise is due to international pressures as Asia and North America have bought increased amounts and the sterling is relatively weak. Diesel prices have also risen by 3p/litre due to a rise in crude oil prices and the cold weather demand for fuel.

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Supermarket Ombudsman

The government, in the form of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, has accepted the Competition Commission's recommendations and announced plans to appoint a Supermarket Ombudsman who will enforce the Groceries Supply Code of Practice, due to come into force on 4th February. A consultation is to take place to determine the best means of enforcement and discussions will be held with retailers and producers to determine the powers that the ombudsman should have.

TB update

The Welsh Assembly will begin a five-year programme to cull badgers on 350 livestock farms in west Wales from April. The Assembly sanctioned the TB Eradication (Wales) Order 2009 last September but waited for an independent ecological study before ratifying the legislation. The programme is estimated to cost £9m over five years. The cull will go ahead despite a judicial review lodged by the Badger Trust.

Campaign for the Farmed Environment

In a bid to fend off a compulsory set-aside replacement in England (see previous briefings), farmers are being urged to consider new environmental stewardship options, such as in-crop cultivated areas for ground nesting birds on arable land and reduced-herbicide cereal crops followed by over-wintered stubbles. These options are contained in the third edition of "*Environmental Stewardship Handbooks*", which will form the legal basis for stewardship agreements from 1st February. Up to 14,000 stewardship agreements are due for renewal this year and if the amount of land under the "entry level" scheme does not increase by 40,000ha within three years then compulsory measures may be introduced forcing farmers to manage a percentage of their land for environmental benefits.

GM crops

Scientists at Leeds University have successfully grown GM potatoes in the UK leading to speculation of a new wave of field crop trials. Trials of the potatoes are due to take place at a secure site in North Yorkshire and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) has also announced plans to plant GM crops on a demonstration farm in Cambridgeshire. The government's Chief Scientist has stated that the UK should do more research with genetically modified crops to meet the challenge of increasing food production.

New national policy

For the first time in more than 50 years the UK government has unveiled a national policy for food production. The document, called "*Food 2030*" calls on farmers to produce more food whilst impacting less on the environment. It wants people to eat a healthy, sustainable diet, produced from a resilient, profitable and competitive food system. More should be done to increase sustainable production and reduce the system's greenhouse gas emissions. Greater emphasis is to be put on reducing and reprocessing waste and on enhancing the research and skills base of the sector. The report has been broadly welcomed by the industry though much of the detail has still to be spelt out.

I hope this is helpful,

Nick