

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

March Briefing 2010

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

Consultation on supermarket ombudsman

The government is consulting on the implementation of proposals to create a supermarket ombudsman. The closing date for responses is 30th April and details are available on the government website www.berr.gov.uk

TB update

Defra is funding a project to vaccinate badgers against bovine TB in six areas of England where there is a high TB incidence within cattle. Two sites are in the West Midlands and four in the South West. Farmers in the areas will be invited to participate and the programme is targeted on badgers around cattle farms. Trapping and vaccination will take place during the summer and autumn to ensure that cubs are vaccinated as soon after birth as possible. It is anticipated that the effectiveness of the programme will not be known for several years as the vaccination will not affect already infected badgers which will need to die off for the risk of transmission to cattle to be reduced. More information is available via www.defra.gov.uk/fera/bvdp Junior Minister Jim Fitzpatrick has stated that the government has not ruled out a badger cull in England to control the disease. He commented that the government was following the cull in Wales with interest. A “dairy manifesto” produced by the industry stresses that tackling bovine TB is a high priority.

Arthur Rank Centre BBC Radio 4 Appeal

The Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) has been a specialist centre on rural issues run by the churches for the last 38 years. It hosts the rural stress helpline and founded the ARC-Addington charity which helps with low cost housing for rural people. It is also the parent body of the Agricultural Chaplains Association. It will be the subject of BBC Radio 4's appeal on Sunday 7th March, or online at BBC.co.uk/Radio4.

Single Farm Payment to go online

The Rural Payments Agency is developing a website to allow farmers to claim their Single Farm Payment online, expected to be available later this year.

New EU Farm Commissioner

Dacian Carlos has been confirmed as the new EU Farm Commissioner by the European Parliament (see previous briefings). He took office on 10th February, replacing Mariann Fischer Boel.

The Rev'd Nick Read OBE FRAGS, The Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life

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New business advice website

The business consultants "Business Link" has launched an online resource to help farmers wanting to apply best practice and understand government regulations. The resource brings together information on grants, environmental protection, running a farm business and the organic sector. Information is also available through its network of business advisers; helpline number 0845 600 9006 or www.businesslink.gov.uk

Costs of farm inputs rise

The cost of farm inputs continues to rise, and in the last six months costs have risen by about 2%. The rise in the "Agricultural Inflation Index" is primarily due to rising fertiliser costs, though the agricultural sector most affected has been the dairy sector due to increased protein and feed costs.

New scheme for upland farmers

Defra has announced details of an Upland Entry Level Scheme (Uplands ELS) to replace the Hill Farm Allowance. The scheme will support farmers who protect wildlife and biodiversity and there is a target of 85% uptake by 2015, with the first agreements expected by 1st July. As with standard ELS it is a points based scheme with compulsory requirements to maintain minimum stock levels and avoid both under- or over-grazing.

Pesticide consultation

Defra is consulting farmers concerning the implementation of EU rules on sustainable use of pesticides (the Sustainable Use Directive). The consultation also includes the best way of warning neighbours that pesticides are to be sprayed. Various options are being considered, from broadly maintaining the status quo to setting statutory reduction targets for specific active ingredients. The UK needs to develop a National Action Plan describing how the Directive will be implemented, and one of the main issues is whether the Action Plan should contain reduction targets. The consultation deadline is 4th May <http://bit.ly/pestresponse> The consultation comes at a time when high levels of Isoproturon (IPU), a banned herbicide, has been found in watercourses across the country. Although IPU has been banned since 30th June 2009 the evidence suggests it was still being used last Autumn.

Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE)

Launched last November, CFE is advocating a voluntary approach to environmental management as an alternative to compulsory set-aside. A recent survey indicates that 85% of farmers have heard of CFE but that more voluntary agreements are needed to achieve the same environmental benefits that the set-aside scheme provided.

Consumers more willing to accept GM

Research undertaken by the Agricultural Biotechnology Council indicates that although 49% of consumers are concerned about GM foods, public opinion is shifting. However, there are still concerns about the contamination between GM and non-GM crops, and the issue of intellectual property rights which could place major sections of the food chain in the control of a few companies.

I hope this is helpful,

Nick