

Diocese of Hereford

Associate Agricultural Chaplain

Serving the Church of England in Herefordshire,
South Shropshire & parts of Powys & Worcestershire



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Dear Colleague

Agricultural Briefing, January 2012

First, a very Happy New Year! Secondly, a few notes about the current state of UK agriculture.

Bovine TB update

Ministers have finally announced a badger cull to combat bovine tuberculosis. Culling is expected to be piloted in two areas in autumn 2012. Whilst the locations have yet to be announced west and south-west England have been highlighted as likely areas. The two pilot culls will take place over six weeks and will examine whether the controlled shooting of badgers is safe, effective and humane. They will be overseen by an independent panel of experts. If the pilots are successful the policy will be rolled out across the country during 2013. However Ministers accept that a legal challenge is highly likely.

Farmers are expected to fund the cull and will be required to combine to form limited companies which will apply to Natural England for a four-year licence to cull badgers. Trained contractors will be used by the company to carry out the cull. Individual farmers may be contracted to participate provided they have a firearms certificate and have completed an approved training course and shooting competency test. Oversight of the culled areas will rest with the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) which will conduct surveillance and testing.

Licenses can only be granted to areas which are already subject to annual testing (i.e. areas of high incidence and high risk). Culling may be permitted via cage trapping and shooting, or controlled shooting. Pilot areas must be a minimum of 150 sq km with sufficient boundaries and buffers and at least 70% of the total area must be accessible for culling and at least 90% accessible or within 200m of accessible land. This is to try and minimise the risk of leaving reservoirs of badgers or allowing rapid re-introduction of badgers into the culled area. In practise it looks as if the cull areas will be significantly larger, from 250-450 sq km. The aim is to reduce the badger population by at least 70% in the control area. There will be closed seasons when culling is not permitted.

There is dispute over the total cost of the pilots. Defra has estimated a £1.4m bill but the NFU has argued for a significantly lower cost, up to £112,000. It is acknowledged that the cost of policing the area against protestors may also be significant. In comparison, nearly 25,000 cattle were slaughtered in England during 2010 because of bovine TB and the cost to the taxpayer is estimated to top £1bn over the next ten years. Almost 25% of all cattle farms in the west and south-west of England were affected by the disease during the year.

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A professional body for agriculture?

Farm Minister Jim Paice has suggested the development of a professional body to promote technical and business expertise for the farming industry, building on the work of the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Council, which currently represents about 75% of total output. This is a distinct role from that of the NFU which represents farmers in the political arena.

UK harvest and future prices

Defra have confirmed that the UK wheat crop grew by 3% last harvest to 15.3m tonnes. The area under wheat production was 2% higher but average yields also rose by 1% to 7.7t/ha. Barley production was up 5% to 5.5m tonnes, with a 13% increase in spring barley offsetting a decline in the area under winter-sown crops and a small reduction in yields. Oilseed rape had a record year, yields rose by 13% to an average of 3.9t/ha and the area under cultivation rose by 10%, leading to a total yield 24% higher at 2.8m tonnes. Spring cropping is likely to be lower this year as good drilling conditions and strong wheat prices encouraged more winter cropping.

Feed grain prices are rising as concern grows over the impact of dry weather on the establishment of maize crops in Argentina and Brazil. January 2012 feed wheat on the London futures market stood at £152/t, £6/t higher than pre-Christmas trading.

Water for Life

Water is in the spotlight as the government has launched a White Paper entitled "Water for Life." Defra suggests that the UK faces a future of water shortages and lasting environmental damage unless our attitudes to water usage change. Water companies and private abstractors are bound by laws that date back to the 1960s and it is felt that these no longer offer sufficient protection to water supplies.

Web tool for wind planning

ADAS has launched a free web-based service to help farmers and landowners decide whether it is feasible to install wind turbines on their land. The tool compares the location of the proposed site against a number of factors such as distance from residential areas, conservation zones, national parks, radar and telecommunication masts, to help identify whether they would be suitable for development. For more information visit www.re-solved.co.uk

Government urged to adopt welfare scheme

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) has asked the government to introduce a Welfare Stewardship Scheme under Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy, to compliment the schemes relating to environmental stewardship. Farmers would be financially rewarded for adopting high standards of animal welfare.

I hope this is helpful,

Nick