

# Devon Churches Rural Forum



## Harvest Farming Update September 2019

### Harvest

Danny Semorad reports “On the farming front I think it has been an excellent year so far. Good weather and good crops have made life easier. Unfortunately cereal and cattle prices are down, likely to be due to the general uncertainty in the country at the moment. How long this continues seems very unclear. However milk prices are still generally good which is good for those with so much invested in their businesses”.

Andy Jerrard says “There are probably very few farmers who at this time last year would have expected to have the fodder stocks they have 12 months on. By and large grass growth has been plentiful and there have been spells of settled weather to enable silage and hay to be made. Cereal crops have on the whole yielded well and as I write the last fields of wheat and beans are being harvested in the immediate area. The crops seem to have yielded well due to a very timely spell of rain in the early summer. Some of the later harvesting has been catchy. It is perhaps timely to remember that maize, potatoes, swedes, carrots, sugar beet and other important food crops are far from all safely gathered in at this stage! The price of breeding sheep has held up well (thus far!).

And Joanne Jones adds “Harvest has been going well with yields much better than last year, but this is likely to lead to a price drop per tonne if selling. Some spring tilled corn is left to harvest and then it will be onto maize - some dry weather in October will help this and reduce mud being brought out onto the roads”.

On pricing Andy Jerrard adds “the prices of beef, cereals and lamb are a cause for concern (and probably other sectors too - there is always a

danger of missing someone out especially with the likes of pigs and poultry where market prices can be so very volatile), tied in with uncertainty as to future support for food production. Some processors have instituted price cuts for the dairy sector and proposed changes to dairy contracts are a worry (not all related directly to milk price).”

And on the importance of Harvest Festivals Andy writes “The rural church has a well-established pastoral network and community connections which are of huge value to those around. Harvest festivals (and harvest suppers in particular) are often opportunities to celebrate with the local rural community, sharing in Gods' goodness and thanking the farmers and their workforce for their hard work in helping most of us to be very well fed.”



### Brexit

Brexit continues to be the major concern for our farmers – not least because of the uncertainty, which among other things affects business decisions about stock and investment.

It is generally felt that our sheep farmers will be more adversely affected than our dairy farmers. This [BBC article](#) explains the tariff issues which would affect exports and imports in the event of a No-Deal, and you can find an up to date summary of Brexit news as it affects farming on the NFU Brexit Hub [here](#).



Perhaps our prayer, as Christians believing in new life, resurrection and renewal, is to pray that God will grow something new out of the current uncertainty and confusion. That whatever the deal, or no-deal, we will all have learned more about the concerns and issues faced by farmers in their production of our food and that in the debate between farming and environmental lobbies some new understanding and common ground may be found to the benefit of all.

## Environment and Emissions

As was noted in our last farming update (June 2019) there has been much recent discussion about the emissions from farm animals and sheep and cattle in particular. This is (as most things) a complex issue. As David Ursell says “One important factor often missed is that grassland is a huge carbon sink. If you get rid of livestock you are going to lose that sink. Many areas of the UK could not grow anything other than grass, so what do you do with it?” Joanne Jones says “Many farms are off setting carbon/methane emissions through alternative energy production & the way slurry is allowed to be spread is changing dramatically to further reduce emissions” and Andy Jerrard comments on the effects on farmers saying “the continual attacks and negative comments in the media are having a significant negative effect on the wellbeing of some.”



For more information you can read the NFU's recent report called “Achieving Net Zero – Farming's 2040 Goal” [here](#) and you may also find the [LEAF](#) (Linking Environment and Farming) website helpful.

## Bovine TB

Andy Jerrard updates us: “Bovine tuberculosis refuses to loosen its evil grip on the livestock industry with several farmers being introduced to the ‘delights’ of being under restriction for the first time. Others, who have swung between restriction and ‘freedom’, find the changes to the rules confusing and deleterious to their health and business. The wider use of the blood test in addition to the skin test has led to increased losses of cattle without (as yet at least) the feeling that this comes with any benefits.”

## Other Issues

There have been a significant amount of barn fires from various causes which always cause distress and difficulty.

Employing farm workers is becoming harder – this may in part be due to less EU migration, but also due to the wage competition from other work such as HGV and plant driving.

Please remember – if you know any farmers who may be struggling for any reason, please signpost them towards the [Farming Community Network](#). We have a wonderful FCN team in Devon who can come alongside and offer real and practical support.

*With many thanks to all our contributors - Andy Jerrard, Danny Semorad, David Ursell and Joanne Jones.*



Why not send us your harvest festival photos and any stories you have - we'd love to add them to our website

[www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk](http://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk)

Email to [info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk](mailto:info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk)

Our next Forum meeting is on 16<sup>th</sup> October and the main theme will be Rural Crime and Modern Slavery in a Rural Context. If you would like more info please email as above. Penny Dobbin Secretary DCRF.