



THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD  
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Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013

To all clergy and farmers of the Diocese

Dear All,

I am taking this unusual step of writing an open letter to you all because of the dire situation of so many of the farmers within our diocese, and indeed more widely across England and Wales. This is almost certainly the most difficult time for the whole farming community since the horrendous "foot and mouth" outbreak twelve years ago. As a result, it is vital that our farmers, their families and our whole rural communities are assured at least of our prayer and support in these straightened times, with as much understanding of their predicament as we can show, together with our listening ears, pastoral help and, where appropriate and possible, practical support too. There are, thankfully, professional groups offering help, and charities such as FCN (The Farming Community Network, formally known as Farm Crisis Network), RABI and the Addington Fund waiting to be contacted. FCN received more calls locally in the first month of this year than the whole of last year, which is a measure of the acuteness of the problems farmers and their families are facing. Welsh farmers were estimating when this year began that their incomes would be down 40%: sadly that figure is likely to be significantly exceeded, with all the hardship, worry and debt that will result.

Among the many significant issues that our farmers are facing, I would mention the following (and you can almost certainly add to the list):

- lambs out on snow covered uplands with many lambs having died in the cold
- grass barely growing yet
- livestock still having to be fed winter feed with farms own supplies likely to have been long since exhausted, and buying in fodder prohibitively expensively
- autumn sowings not possible on vast acreages because of the extreme wet conditions
- many potato crops and others ruined in the soil
- the ground was still too wet in many areas for early spring sowing
- even where spring (and autumn) sowing has taken place, there is as yet limited germination and little growth
- the scourge of Bovine TB continues to attack herds and farms
- milk prices, despite having risen a little, are still woefully inadequate given the rise food and fuel costs
- Schmallenberg virus is present in our area, if patchy, and immensely worrying too
- the absence of the last autumn sowing will mean that there will be a shortage of next winter's feed on many farms, however good the summer may be
- fuel gets no cheaper and loans still need paying

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This is a very sorry catalogue of problems that farmers are having to face, as we know. While there is nothing that those of us outside the farming community can do about the underlying issues themselves, and not much that those in the farming industry can do about weather conditions, fuel and feed costs, disease and so on, we can nevertheless demonstrate our support by showing as much care and understanding as possible, so that those suffering hardship and extreme worry and isolation can at least know of our solidarity. Practically, we can buy locally sourced food as much as possible to ensure returns to the local economy.

I do not imagine that it is necessary for me to encourage those of you in village communities to make contact yourselves and through your congregations with as many of your farmers and their families as possible, and point them in the direction of other help if that seems wise, but please do reassure people of the prayer and concern and support of us all across the whole of our diocese. There is an ecumenical support group within the diocese headed up by David Gwatkin ( [brc.gwatkin@ymail.com](mailto:brc.gwatkin@ymail.com); mobile 07531 676 832) and our Associate Agricultural Chaplain, Rev'd Nick Read (mobile 07973 361 055, e-mail, [agchap@btinternet.com](mailto:agchap@btinternet.com)), and others of us who would be pleased to do what we can as well.

The Farming Community Network helpline is 0845 367 9990, e-mail [mail@fcn.org.uk](mailto:mail@fcn.org.uk); whilst the RABI helpline is 0300 303 7373, e-mail [grants@rabi.org.uk](mailto:grants@rabi.org.uk)

With our very best wishes and prayers,

Yours ever,

+Anthony