

From the Churches Rural Group of Churches Together in England.

A letter for general circulation. January 2019.

Please pass it on to churches and Christians far and wide.



Supporting the Farming Community

The weather made 2018 a challenging year for many farmers. For sheep farmers the problems began in the autumn of 2017 when prolonged cold and damp affected ewe fertility. The snow and cold temperatures of the 'Beast from the East' arrived at lambing time and there were losses of new lambs and ewes as well as cattle. This resulted in cash flow problems with fewer lambs to sell in the autumn and higher prices for replacement ewes.

The prolonged drought in some areas meant that farmers began feeding their livestock in the summer with forage made for the winter months since there wasn't enough nutritious grass. Many will not have been able to produce as much silage as normal and this coupled with early feeding may have led to shortages and higher prices. Concerns about price and availability will add to the stress some farmers are experiencing.

In the arable sector, the cold spring meant that some crops were sown late and established crops had their growth affected. Many crops were harvested early, but lack of water meant that some yields were low. There will be regional variations as to the quality and amount of grain, fruit and vegetables that have been harvested.

Add to this the fact that for some there have been significant delays with payment of subsidy amounts and payments for environmental schemes, finances that often contribute to over half of the farm budget. Uncertainty of when these payments would come through has led to severe cash flow problems and significant stress for the farmers involved.

This has added to the anxiety many have over how things will be post BREXIT especially since the deal is still unclear. You may not have farmers in your congregations, but they may well be in your communities. Are there things your church can do to reach out to them? For example;

- Can you pray regularly for local farmers?
- Could you send letters or cards to say you are thinking of them?
- Are there places where farmers meet in your area?, if so, can the church be present?

If your area has a rural officer or agricultural chaplain, why not get in touch and see how your congregations can be of help.

We have listed some of the organisations that exist to help farmers perhaps you can publicise them in your networks. They also may be able to supply speakers for services and events as well as put you in touch with local representatives.

The Farming Community Network (FCN)

Provides free, confidential, pastoral and practical support to farmers and farming families through its helpline and a national network of volunteers.

Helpline: 03000 111 999
General Enquiries: 01788 510866
Email: help@fcn.org.uk,
Website: www.fcn.org.uk

Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI)

Financial support to farming people of all ages who are in hardship.

Helpline: 0808 281 949
General Enquiries: 01865 724 931
Email: info@rabi.org.uk,
Website: www.rabi.org.uk

Addington Fund

Support with housing for farming families

General Enquiries: 01926 620135
Website: www.addingtonfund.org.uk

If we can help with any questions, please get in touch

Rev Dr Mark Betson
National Rural Officer
for the Church of England
mark.betson@churchofengland.org

Rev Elizabeth Clark
National Rural Officer for the Methodist
and United Reformed Church
elizabethc@germinate.net