

HOPE FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

Seeds of Prayer

The seasons

February is the month of waiting, the last, quiet pause of winter before the year stirs into renewed natural vigour. The early signs are there: heads of snowdrops, hellebore's flowers nodding amid new green leaves, viburnum's tiny displays bursting out. God is always doing a new thing, but even in our waiting for it He blesses and amazes us. *Give thanks for new life in Jesus, and for His grace as we patiently anticipate what He will do next...*

For Your love we praise You,
For Your mercy we thank You,
For Your grace we bless You,
For Your patience we honour You,
Our living Lord Jesus.

People

Farming is always unpredictable, but Brexit uncertainty, unprecedented weather, and bovine TB have made the last few years particularly turbulent. The Bill's seven-year transition period, with the detail yet to be concluded, means farmers face continuing uncertainty. *Pray for all reaching out to farmers with pastoral and practical support, including rural chaplains and Farming Community Network (fcn.org.uk) and for those seeking to share the Gospel with farming people, including Agricultural Christian Fellowship (acfhub.com) and Farming Christian Link (farmingchristianlink.co.uk).*

After Brexit

In February, the Government's post-Brexit Agriculture Bill published in January will continue its progress through Parliament. The Bill (tinyurl.com/agbill2020) has been described as "one of the most significant pieces of legislation for farmers .. for over 70 years" (tinyurl.com/agbill2020nfu). This month's Seeds focuses our prayers on some of the challenges and opportunities the Bill will present to farmers and to all concerned for the future of rural Britain.

Farming

The Bill aims to make farm policy more collaborative and less bureaucratic, and has been welcomed cautiously by farming organisations. But, its central intention of delinking payments from the requirement to farm the land and instead rewarding farmers for delivering 'public goods' represents a fundamental shift in the way most farmers think. And there remain concerns about trade policy and food standards. *Continue to pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2), that they will 'decree what is just' and 'govern justly' (Proverbs 8:15-16). Pray for a greater sense of partnership between the farming community and policy makers in shaping the future.*

Environment

'The earth is the Lord's' and 'all His works praise Him' (Psalms 24:1, 145:10). Under the Bill's 'public money for public goods' approach, farmers will be expected to deliver better countryside access and environmental benefits, including improved soil quality (tinyurl.com/soilbill). *Pray for the restoration of physical soil to parallel a preparation of the 'good soil' of people's hearts to receive the seed of the Gospel (Matthew 13: 23). Pray that new policies will both preserve the natural environment and maintain farm incomes. Pray that all who visit the countryside to enjoy God's creation will have their eyes opened to the Creator (Romans 1:19-20).*

Animals

'A righteous man regards the life of his animal' (Proverbs 12:10). The Bill includes provisions to reward farmers for "protecting and improving the health and welfare of livestock" (tinyurl.com/agbill2020). *Pray for specific policies to be formulated that maintain and improve farm animal welfare and justly reward those who care for them. Pray for all livestock farmers and the animals they farm. Pray for greater understanding among Christians of God's standards for our relationship with farm and wild animals (see villagehope.uk/animal-stories).*

'Hope for the Countryside' is a partnership between Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Village Hope, the World Prayer Centre and Top Barn Trust. Our aim is to mobilise and resource prayer for rural Britain. Our vision is of beacons of prayer lighting up across our countryside. Our prayer is for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit across the countryside of our nation.

'Seeds of prayer' is offered as a resource for prayer for individuals and prayer groups and for use in church services and other meetings. If you have found the 'seeds' helpful and inspiring or would like to feed back your own insights and prayers then we would be very happy to hear from you.

