

Signs of hope

This first issue of Seeds for 2024 revisits some of themes we explored in 2023.

Rural housing

In November 2023, the Countryside Charity (CPRE) released a report on the crisis in rural affordable housing in England (bit.ly/cprerhc). It revealed that "communities in rural England face an existential threat from an acute and overlooked shortage of genuinely affordable housing" and called for immediate action to provide adequate, affordable housing to sustain our rural communities. It would take nearly 89 years to clear the current rural social housing waiting list of over 306,730 people, based on the present rate of social rent delivery. *Give thanks for this report. Pray for all government leaders and for a strong voice to rise from the Body of Christ so that housing policy can be redefined and long-term solutions found ([Proverbs 29:7](#)).*

Isolation & mental health

Isolation and mental health problems, faced by many farmers, are being tackled by a new initiative, the 'Plough On' project, run by the Northern Irish farming charity, Rural Support (bbc.in/41TA9OH). It has 12 groups up and running already, with plans for 17 in total across Northern Ireland in the next 5 years. "We're reconnecting the farmers back into their local communities and with their neighbours and realising the benefits that brings in terms of reducing social isolation, and also improving their mental health and wellbeing", said Project Coordinator, Keelin Reilly. *Give thanks and pray for Plough On and other charities working to reduce isolation in rural communities across the UK ([Psalm 46:1-3](#))*

'From farm to fork'

In 2023, a petition to reform the grocery supply code of practice was submitted to Parliament as almost half of a panel of 100 UK fruit and veg farmers were fearful that they would have to give up their farms within the next 12 months. Many raised concerns about the behaviour of supermarkets, calling for tougher regulations to redress the imbalance of power between farmers, processors and the supermarkets. Parliament will debate the 'Reform of Grocery Supply Code of Practice' on 22 January 2024. *Give thanks for this development; pray for a robust debate and for any contractual unfairness to be rectified ([1 Timothy 2:1-4](#)).*

Bovine TB

Data for 2023 shows a modest decline in herd infections in England, a slight increase in Wales, and much local variation across the country; Scotland remains TB free; around 30,000 cattle continue to be slaughtered each year (bit.ly/tx2023). UK governments are committed to eradicating the disease, but there is a lack of incentives for farmers to invest time and money in prevention measures. *Pray for wisdom for governments re-evaluating policies to make more positive impacts on farming businesses, for progress with licensing vaccines, and for all to work together for positive outcomes. Where there is a spiritual dimension, pray that local communities will own the problem, and pray for the healing of their land. (More detail at bit.ly/hcibtpro.)*

A new year, a new season

As we start a new year, pray for a new impetus to, and blessing upon, Hope Countryside's vision of "beacons of prayer lighting up across rural Britain, bringing hope both to the countryside and from the countryside to the whole of the nations of the UK".

The Hope Countryside team meets for a 'strategy day' on Monday 22 January 2024. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire our discussions and decisions.

In March, we shall hold our first prayer gathering in the North East (see below). Pray that the Lord will prompt many to attend and that He will use this to extend Hope Countryside's vision to new areas and new people.

Lord, we have heard of your fame; we stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy ([Habakkuk 3:2](#)).

Prayer Gathering, North East

Hope Countryside Prayer Gathering
Saturday 2 March 2024
11 AM - 4 PM

Emmanuel Church
Macnay Street
Saltburn-by-the-Sea
North Yorkshire, TS12 1LE

Please join us for Hope Countryside's first gathering in North-East England.

All welcome. For more information, contact us at info@hopecountryside.uk.