

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Strategy must yield results to meet our global food needs

Food and farming is an ingrained part of life in this region.

But with the mounting global challenge of feeding the world in an era of rising population and potential water shortages, Norfolk could have a crucial role to play.

That is the belief of backers of the new Agricultural Technologies Strategy which seeks to bring together the farming industry and our food science experts in order to meet this challenge. And there are many reasons why this region is so well placed – the most obvious being that our farmers produce so much of the nation's food. But in addition, scientists at the John Innes Centre and the Institute for Food Research have been carrying out pioneering food research for many years.

So will this strategy help join the dots?

That must be the hope, and there is an additional benefit, too, for at a local level the strategy envisages greater collaboration between Norwich and Cambridge. And that is not just between academic researchers. If the links are to be seriously strengthened, then it will also require broader collaboration and improving connections such as rail links between the two cities.

At its heart the strategy is about how we put food on the table in a future of changing climates and more limited resources while the number of mouths to feed rises.

But although the seeds have been sown today, we must look at what the policy will yield to meet those challenges.

Rail crash investigation

Thankfully, rail crashes are a very rare occurrence in Britain, but it's of concern that two trains collided at Norwich station just after midnight yesterday.

An investigation has been launched into the crash, which left eight people injured, and the cause of the crash needs to be determined as soon as possible, to put rail users' minds at rest.

The eight people who were taken to hospital will be feeling lucky to have survived with just minor injuries, and they talk of their relief in today's paper. But, all the same, it would have been a very frightening experience.

Rail bosses said it was too early to determine what caused the crash and whether it was a case of human error or a technical fault.

Let's hope the investigation is concluded as a matter of urgency.

Sun danger warning

With the warm weather set to continue this week we could all do with heeding a message being shouted from the rooftops by Sarah Crowe, from Oulton, near Lowestoft.

Mrs Crowe was diagnosed with malignant skin cancer after her close friend, Lisa Cole, "nagged" at her to go to the doctors as she had a mole on her back which had changed colour.

That was more than five years ago and, thankfully, Mrs Crowe has had an operation to have the mole removed.

She now regularly checks her moles and is urging others to do the same to prevent them going through a similar ordeal.

It is a timely plea as figures reveal 400 people in Norfolk and Suffolk are being diagnosed with the cancer every year. So please beware as well as enjoy the sun.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ The windmill at Weybourne as seen by J Allan Black. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Why there should be more chances to use the word 'less'

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In a light-hearted column in the EDP last week, new grandfather Paul Durrant came to some entertaining decisions about what role he could play in the new baby's life. A couple of his decisions, though, seemed a bit questionable to me.

First, Paul wants to make sure his grandson will be able to recite the names of the West Bromwich Albion side that won the FA Cup in 1954. Really? Surely what he actually means is the names of the Norwich City side that made it to the semi-final replay in 1959?

And he wants the little boy to know the grammatical difference between less and fewer. I think he's on to a loser there too. Paul has probably been listening to self-appointed grammar experts who reckon that 'less' should apply only to singular nouns, while 'fewer' applies to the plural: less cheese, less water, less time, less money; but fewer biscuits, fewer drinks, fewer minutes, fewer coins.

'Less of it', they say, but 'fewer of them'. But millions of people do actually say 'less biscuits, less drinks'. English-speaking people have always done that, ever since



■ More or less tasty: Why should it be less cheese but fewer cheeses?

the time of King Alfred. The "less-fewer rule" was invented at the end of the 18th century by someone who had nothing better to do.

So I don't think we can be at all surprised if normal English-speaking people say 'less drinks'. It's been normal in English for a millennium and a half. And, anyway, what these would-be grammarians tell us is that the use of 'fewer' versus 'less' is a purely automatic consequence of whether these words modify plural or singular nouns. Plural – fewer. Singular – less. That's it.

But if an alternation is totally automatic, then it's useless. It doesn't do any work. It doesn't tell you anything. It has no signifi-

cance. There is no point in differentiating between them at all, so it's no surprise if people don't.

After all, what is the opposite of less cheese? More cheese.

What is the opposite of fewer people? More people.

If 'more' works perfectly well for both singular and plural, then 'less' can do the same. If we don't need a separate word for 'more' in the plural, then we don't need 'fewer' either.

However, if you do prefer to say 'fewer of them' – and why not, if you want to – be sure to pronounce it in the correct Norwich way. So that will be: Fur on 'em.

WORDS FOR LIFE

The Lord is slow to anger but great in power.
Nahum 1:3

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