

Hello all,

Since my last newsletter in June 2021 (which unsurprisingly was also on TB) there have been a number of changes to government policy across England and Wales. I hope to discuss the current situation, addressing the effects TB has had on so many in the agricultural industry and what the changes in policy mean for all of us as we continue to battle this disease.

Upcoming meetings:

Real success communication with Paul Harris
—6th April

Medicine training courses in person or via Zoom
—held regularly

Beef herd nutrition with Neil Howie and Kat Hart
—26th April

Badger Cull and Badger Vaccination

2022 will be the last year that cull companies can apply for new intensive badger cull licenses and all supplementary cull licenses will stop in 2023.

The government has decided that a comprehensive badger vaccination program will replace the badger cull, but as yet we have no idea what this program will look like. APHA has carried out a number of studies aimed at testing the efficacy of vaccinating badgers with the following findings reported:

- Vaccination reduces the likelihood of badgers developing lesions or excreting TB bacteria
- Vaccination reduces the rate of new infections (measured using diagnostic tests) in badgers by 76%
- Vaccinating more than 1/3 of adults in a badger social group reduces new infections (measured using diagnostic tests) in unvaccinated badger cubs by 79%

There is currently no evidence to suggest badger vaccination would reduce TB in cattle, but it would be expected that reducing TB in badgers would eventually have a beneficial effect on TB in cattle.

The lack of information from APHA on how this will be carried out, who will be expected to pay and on what scale leaves many serious questions to be answered.

Culling badgers is not part of the governments long term control strategy but there are valid points to be made around how we move forward and learn from our experiences and evidence base. The Downs report provided evidence that culling badgers helped reduce the

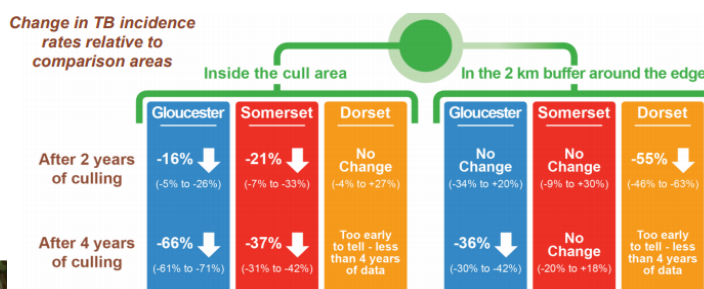
How are badgers vaccinated?

- Traps are deployed near signs of badger activity (setts, runs or latrines).
- Traps are usually locked open and pre-baited with peanuts (typically for 7-10 days).
- Traps are set to capture for two consecutive nights.
- Traps are checked in the early morning and captured badgers are vaccinated with BCG (the same vaccine used in humans), temporarily marked and released.



<https://www.tbknowledgeexchange.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/AR-factsheet-badger-vaccination.pdf>

So, for badgers at least, we know that vaccination can reduce TB.



*Refers to changes in the OTF-W (official TB free – withdrawn) incidence rate (with 95% Confidence Interval). OTF-W incidents are TB breakdowns where Mycobacterium bovis infection has been confirmed in at least one animal from the herd by post-mortem tests.
<https://www.tbknowledgeexchange.co.uk>

incidence of TB in cattle:

Our worry is that whilst APHA try to devise a seemingly last minute plan on how to deliver badger vaccination, the gains that have been made from the culls will be lost. It feels that politics once again has muddied the waters of evidenced based progress, and the short-sited plans to stop the badger cull so abruptly and with no practical alternative may do considerable damage.

Annual to Six Month Whole Herd Testing

Herds that are Officially TB Free (OTF) were required to carry out their Whole Herd Test (WHT) on an annual basis. This has now changed to every 6 months.

For many already under restriction before this change in policy started this will not seem so important, but it highlights areas of testing policy that apply to all.

The theory behind the increase in testing frequency is that it will lead to earlier detection of disease in herds and therefore earlier intervention. This is a useful change for people who are at an increased risk of TB despite being OTF, but this policy change is not without its challenges:

- Added financial, emotional and welfare pressures to accommodate the often inconvenient times in which the 6 month testing window falls

APHA will allow you to move a test window if the issued dates have health and welfare implications.

- Current testing policy does not equip farmers with the necessary tools to effectively tackle disease once it has been discovered on farm



The skin test does provide us with a useful screening test for herds as the specificity or false positive rate is 1 in 5000 (this means an average of one false positive result for every 5000 uninfected cattle tested) so when we have a reactor on the skin test we can reliably say that TB is on farm and commence measures to identify other infected individuals in the herd.

The problem with this policy change is what happens after the skin test identifies disease. The Short Interval Test (SIT) becomes the mainstay of a farm's TB control program as we test and cull cows out of a herd. Unfortunately for the majority this is the least appropriate or useful test to help inform where the risk lies in your herd and what animals are infected. This is because the sensitivity or false negative rate, reported to be 1 in 5 (meaning you miss 1 in 5 infected cattle each time you test) is in fact

astonishingly more variable than that, meaning the skin test cannot be used to effectively remove infection from a herd. This is reflected in the high rate of farms that dip in and out of restrictions as they go OTF and spend 6-12 months 'clear' before reactors are found again. It is likely for many of these farms that there was still a reservoir of disease in the cattle despite them testing clear.

This is why other tests like the Interferon-gamma blood test have been introduced to try and help improve the sensitivity of our diagnostic tests.

But the truth is that every farm is different and has a different level of risk (as with any other disease). This means that the lack of autonomy for farmers and their vets to decide how and when to test their cows holds them back from effectively managing and eventually eradicating TB.

Much is being done by the practice and our farms to engage local APHA representatives and MP's on how future policy should be shaped. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any thoughts or ideas that you think should be discussed. Together we can make a big difference.

TB's Impact on Mental Health and Well-Being

The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) found that over a third of farming people are 'probably or possibly depressed.'

Shifting public opinion, Brexit, COVID and the war in Ukraine has propelled the agricultural industry into even harsher realms of cost and uncertainty. As herds find themselves placed under TB restrictions the outlook for many is bleak.

The herculean effort from the industry to organise and engage with each other has been astonishing. Cull companies have brought many communities together to form cohesive teams that, through hard work and determination, have implemented effective wildlife control measures. Information sharing through TB Eradication Groups has promoted the many ways in which farms can reduce their risk of TB. It is fair to say that groups like these have become vital support networks, where there is a collective understanding of how dangerous TB is to farmers and their livelihoods.



There are a number of groups and charities that can provide vital support for those in need of help. The Farming Community Network have a presence at almost all of the TB meetings that I attend. They have resources for financial and emotional support.



To talk to a sympathetic person who understands farmers and rural life, call:

03000 111999



If you wish to talk more about TB then please contact the office to book a completely free TB Advisory Service visit with either myself or Ben Jowett. Over roughly 2 hours we aim to provide an overview of your farms risks and what can be done to help fight the disease (2 hours with me for free, what more could you ask for!)



Wishing you all the best,

Ben

Cultivate

Continued Professional Development

Practical on-farm learning for a sustainable future

Cultivate CPD has been created due to the demand we have seen from within the veterinary and farming industries for quality training, provided by companies and people who are actually implementing the things they teach on a day-to-day basis. The George Farm Vets has a long and successful history of practical education. Cultivate CPD also allows us to make the most of the skills we have within our team and to positively affect the health and welfare of the animals by improving the skills of the vets and farmers looking after them.



Cultivate CPD hosted its first course yesterday on sustainability which attracted Vets from across the country. Kat and Ed led both a morning session on the principles before taking the Vets out on farm in the afternoon to apply their learning from the morning.

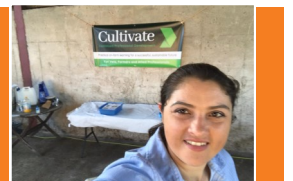


Our Vet-led courses will be aimed at providing events and on-farm learning for Vets, farmers and all allied professionals. Future courses will be advertised at CultivateCPD.co.uk

Follow us on



Kathryn Hart
BVSc BSc Cert AVP (Cattle)
MRCVS



WELCOMING FARMERS, PRODUCERS, VETS AND INDUSTRY SUPPLIERS



The **GEORGE**
Farm Vets



Cow Convention - Weds 18th May

Tickets £10+ VAT: please contact the office or one of the team

Marsh Farm Hotel
Royal Wootton Bassett
Swindon. SN4 8ER

10:30am - 3:30pm



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W: www.georgevetgroup.co.uk

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