

DEFRA – “Government sets out next phase of strategy to combat bovine tuberculosis”

Background

The Government issued a press release on the 5th March 2020 regarding its strategy for combating bovine tuberculosis. The strategy is part of the scheme to try to eradicate bTB by 2038 and this is part of the government’s response to an independent review of its 25-year bTB strategy, led by Professor Sir Charles Godfray.

According to the update, in England, the overall number of new herd incidents of the disease down by 9% in the last year (to Nov 2019), a 10% reduction in the number of herds not officially free of the disease and a 4% reduction in the total number of animals slaughtered due to the disease.

Key points for the next 5 years

The most obvious point to note for the near future is - **Surveillance testing for the disease, already mandatory in England’s High Risk Area (HRA), will also be increased in frequency in two (HRA) counties – Shropshire and Staffordshire – from annual to six-monthly from later this year. It is expected this will be extended to all parts of the High Risk Area from 2021.**

- **Cattle vaccination** – field trials to start soon, aim is to get a vaccine within 5 years.
- **Wildlife control** – phasing out culling over next few years and start using surveillance and vaccination in badgers. The vaccination programme will start in areas where the four-year cull cycle has ended, alongside ongoing surveillance of the disease in badgers in that area.
- **Improving diagnostics, surveillance and epidemiology** to root out bTB more effectively.
 - **Surveillance testing for the disease**, already mandatory in England’s High-Risk Area (HRA), will also be increased in frequency in two (HRA) counties – Shropshire and Staffordshire – from annual to six-monthly from later this year. It is expected this will be extended to all parts of the High-Risk Area from 2021.
 - **Minimal details on how the tests may change** but the review report did discuss utilising the Single Intradermal Cervical Test (SICT) in HRA/EA areas, rather than relying on the comparative test currently used, also combination of tests to be used as well. When these test types are to be used on farm is not yet clear, but there is evidence that the current TB tests used will not remain the only tests used in the future. Further information on the different tests can be found in the Surveillance and diagnostics section of the policy paper- Bovine TB strategy review: summary and conclusions, link supplied below.
- **Incentivising** the uptake of effective biosecurity measures and managing the bTB risks posed by cattle movements to reduce the risk of spread of bTB within and between farms.
- **Developing governance of bTB** eradication, trying to establish a partnership between government and industry.

Other resources:

Godfray report summary: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategy-for-achieving-bovine-tuberculosis-free-status-for-england-2018-review/bovine-tb-strategy-review-summary-and-conclusions>

Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategy-for-achieving-bovine-tuberculosis-free-status-for-england-2018-review-government-response/executive-summary>

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This advice is correct as of 16 March 2020, any fundamental change or omission may affect the accuracy of the advice given...

