

Practical steps to defend against TB

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Badger culling in the fight against bovine TB or vaccination of badgers and/or cattle are all in various stages of development, but in any practical sense are years away. However, there are steps farms can take now to reduce risk from this crippling problem.

Cattle catch TB mainly by breathing in the bacteria from other infected animals, but also by eating feed, fodder or pasture that has been contaminated with infected faeces, urine, saliva and pus from abscesses.

Protecting cattle from catching TB means avoiding these routes of infection. Cattle become infected either from other cattle or from wildlife contacts that have TB. Many different species can carry TB, but the only significant wildlife reservoir in the UK is the badger.

Cattle-to-cattle spread

Reducing the risk of infection between cattle within a herd is not specific to TB. Providing good ventilation and avoiding overstocking at housing are particularly important.

It is also important to control other diseases such as BVD, which can suppress immunity.

HIGH-RISK ANIMALS

More specifically for TB control, following a TB test some animals will be identified as higher risk (eg reactors awaiting removal, inconclusive reactors awaiting retest, or purchased animals).

These animals should be isolated from other cattle on the farm, in a building with separate airspace.

Isolation pens will need to be cleaned and disinfected once reac-



To help prevent the spread of TB, troughs need to be checked and cleaned regularly.

tors have been removed, following DEFRA guidelines.

BIOSECURITY

Farms also need to reduce the risk of transmission from other farms, and this means good biosecurity.

There must be enough separation to prevent nose-to-nose contact at farm boundaries. This includes fencing, any gateways or shared water access.

Electric fencing to keep cattle three metres from neighbours' cattle will achieve this and plays an important part in reducing the risk of transmission of many other important diseases, as well as TB.

Avoid buying, hiring or sharing cattle, including bulls. If replacements do need to be purchased, consider the testing history of the farm of origin, rather than just relying on a pre-movement TB test.

Badger-to-cattle spread

AT GRASS

Farms need to minimise the chances of contact between cattle and badgers and their urine/faeces.

The first step is to identify the badger setts, the paths they use and their latrines. Latrines are small holes with badger droppings in them, usu-

ally close to the sett, often along the side of a fence, road or hedge.

An electric fence around any sett, path and latrine areas can keep cattle away from these areas, but if possible, the best course is to avoid such fields for grazing cattle and use them for sheep or crops.

Supplementary feed and water can be supplied above the height that badgers can reach. Troughs need to be checked and cleaned regularly.

Cattle at grass should only have the feed they can finish during daytime – do not leave any excess for badgers at night. If feeding just for minerals, consider boluses for supplementation rather than feed.

FARM BUILDINGS AND FEED STORAGE

Silage should be safe to eat a few weeks after it is made, but can become contaminated in the clamp, so keep it well covered.

Consider using electric netting to keep badgers away from the face when cattle don't need access.

Badgers visit farm buildings more often than is realised. FERA carried out a study of farm buildings in Gloucestershire using surveillance cameras. They demonstrated that more than half the farms were visited by badgers and that some were visited on two out of three nights, often by significant numbers of badgers.

Badgers tend to visit after dusk,

Key points – reducing the risk of TB infection

- Isolate reactors and inconclusive reactors promptly and effectively
- Avoid or take great care when sourcing purchased cattle
- Avoid contact across boundaries
- Identify badger setts, paths and latrines
- Avoid these or fence them off
- Minimise badgers' access to feed and water troughs
- Badgers will get through a three-inch gap
- Badger-proof buildings and feed stores

particularly to feed stores.

Cattle will avoid badger droppings at grass, but are less likely to do so if feed is contaminated by droppings or urine.

Badger-proof buildings by blocking up gaps and having sheer sides which limit climbing. Where it isn't practical, consider using metal-lidded containers. A badger will get through a three-inch gap and whatever control measures are used, need to be used every night and kept properly repaired.

DEFRA have some good material on YouTube, giving more details on these TB control measures. You can view it at www.youtube.com/defrauk

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