

TB accountability needed

IT IS with a heavy heart I read the announcement from Defra that more draconian cattle measures are to be introduced in Cheshire.

The policy-makers must not have read, or are choosing to ignore, the history of TB in the UK and Ireland. Otherwise, they would know this was tried in the 1970s by William Tait in the south west of England, and Chief Veterinary Officer Downie in Ireland.

Mr Tait's measures included incredibly stringent cattle testing frequency under severe interpretation, along with strict cattle movement restrictions, whole herd slaughters and other biosecurity measures.

In both areas, TB continued to persist at the same rate in cattle, because of the background wildlife infection and the failed policy had to be abandoned.

However, the lives of many cows and the livelihoods of many farmers were wiped out in the process. In Cheshire, we have tested our badgers and about 20 per cent are positive for bacterial culture, a 100-fold increase on the levels we had in the 1990s.

Due to the insensitivity of culture as a test, we can be confident this means more than half of our badgers are likely to be infected.

You can be assured draconian cattle measures alone will have no chance at all of ridding our county of TB when we have a large and heavily-infected population of badgers.



The debate over what action should be taken against TB rages on.

In the absence of, or at least at a very low level of wildlife infection which was being managed, cattle measures would work fine to keep TB under control.

This has been shown repeatedly around the world, as well as here in the UK.

We have failed to hold policy makers to account over past decisions regarding TB, so will there be any accountability this time?

**Den Leonard,
Lambert, Leonard and May,
Whitchurch,
Shropshire.**



RSPB accused of 'losing touch'

An action group led by farmers and landowners claimed the RSPB had lost touch with the interests of birdlife and had alienated people who live and work in the countryside. Here is what our readers at www.farmersguardian.com thought:

»Totally agree with the campaign. We see the results of policies on the ground, but RSPB automatically refutes any

State of rivers a cause for concern

I RECENTLY put the following questions to the chief executive of our water board, Danum Drainage:

1 Does the board have a view on the river Went, which is more like a pond than a watercourse?

2 If it does have a view, is it considered to be in an adequate state to be an effective drain?

3 If it does not believe it to be adequate, is the board putting pressure on the Environment Agency to carry out or allow significant work (not just reed cutting) and in what timescale?

4 Does the board think the annual cleaning of internal drainage board dykes is good value for money until the watercourses into which they run are improved?

5 The water level policy based on modelling data the board states it is developing sounds a good idea so long as it is not another reason to put off work to improve drainage in our area. When will it conclude and how will the strategy be implemented, as the rivers are outside the board's responsibility?

The chief executive's response was to include the issues in the board's meeting papers, but not seek answers at the meeting. If these sort of questions are not policy and strategy issues then I wonder what are.

Time goes on and rivers continue to deteriorate in an area where flooding has been a hugely costly problem on two occasions in the last decade. No-one seems prepared to show any leadership.

I would like to know the logic behind the decision to leave our rivers to deteriorate and why a much better storage capacity and faster flow will not assist in flood control and water table depth. If dredging was good for Somerset, why is it not good for us?

I am at a loss to know how to take this matter further - would a drainage rate payers' strike grab some attention?

**R.W. Metcalfe,
Fenwick,
Doncaster.**

problem in a patronising way and trots out its own disparaging comments.

Gill Hodgson

»I have worked in the countryside for 40 years and have witnessed the changes here in southern England. Let's farm responsibly - make allowances for climate change and work together for a richer, diverse and productive countryside.

Monty Larkin

»I would not call myself an active RSPB supporter, but I am sick of reading all of the anti-RSPB comments from people who do not appear to have a clue. If you have a point to make, do it with evidence.

Anonymous

»As the RSPB has explained, it must spend money on other things than education. To spend all of its money on a few nature reserves would be ridiculous.

Robert Cant