

Tackling Bovine TB Together Press Release

Extensive report sets out clear and evidence-based recommendations for tackling the disease together and protecting our natural world.

Embargoed release: 00:01 9 January 2024

Badger Trust's new report, 'Tackling Bovine TB Together: Towards Sustainable, Scientific and Effective bTB Solutions', is a significant attempt to get a collaborative way forward in dealing with the damaging disease of bovine TB in the most effective way possible. The approach is rooted in looking at the evidence to get a policy framework and measures that reduce the impact of bovine TB on cattle and other animals throughout Great Britain. It contains clear and evidence-based recommendations for the best way forward in tackling the disease and protecting our natural world.

The report brings together evidence around bTB spread and attempted control over the last fifty years and points to a more effective approach for Great Britain, especially England, focusing on cattle, cattle testing and vaccination and enhanced cattle biosecurity (including cattle movement). This approach would lean on the more effective methods used in Wales and Scotland, leading to a faster reduction in bTB rates throughout Great Britain and the suffering this causes. With cattle-to-cattle transmission the proven primary method of bTB spread, the report also calls for an immediate end to the distracting, destructive, and costly badger cull that does not address the spread of bTB in cattle.

Summary of Report Recommendations

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Polymakers

- Polymakers need to make a unified effort to tackle bovine tuberculosis by adopting a non-cull strategy towards badgers that is already being effectively implemented in neighbouring countries. This needs to be combined with an honest and evidence-based narrative about the limited role of badgers and other wildlife in the spread of bTB in cattle.
- Urgently establish a cross-sector coalition group that includes vets, the farming industry, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders to dispel inaccurate information

regarding bTB risk pathways and the most effective best-practice disease prevention strategies.

- Task the coalition group of stakeholders with supporting a shift in the anti-badger rhetoric towards a rhetoric of sustainable coexistence in line with national and global biodiversity and sustainability goals. Resources need to be provided that support farmers and landowners to protect the health and welfare of both badgers and livestock and to assist in transparent communications between diverse groups such as the farming industry and nature-based NGOs.
- Invest in educational outreach efforts to better equip farmers with the knowledge of bTB epidemiology so that farmers are aware of the significance of cattle-cattle transmission.
- Provide sufficient funds to cover appropriate farmer compensation schemes for bTB testing and eradication, providing both financial and mental health support.
- Compensation schemes need to be linked to biosecurity and husbandry measures in place on farms to reward best practices.
- Invest more resources into the more rapid development and roll-out of a cattle vaccine and diva testing. Lack of trust in the government's ability to develop and successfully implement a cattle vaccine is in need of urgent attention. Policymakers ought to be more transparent with the details of the cattle vaccination development. Only through a complete and comprehensive vaccination and testing programme will the entire farm network be protected from the devastating impacts of bTB in cattle.
- Significantly increase resources into validating and approving more accurate tests such as the Actiphage test and the Enferplex tests as soon as possible. These tests could be critical to better and earlier detection of infected animals.
- It is highly likely that improvements in cattle testing would create an initial rise in bTB cases as more infected cattle are positively identified. Thus, policymakers should prepare farmers for this likely outcome and implement measures to assist farmers with the financial and psychological impact of the testing and cattle removal process.
- Better enforce timely bTB cattle tests otherwise risking the movement of undetected cattle.
- Ensure an effectively robust Livestock Information System to identify farms acting as bTB "hubs" that could be targeted with additional disease prevention measures to protect the farm network. Ideally, this will be a combined effort in the bTB security strategy with the devolved nations.
- Better support British farmers to integrate bTB control measures into their animal welfare and environmental sustainability practices and legislation.
- Direct resources into developing a viable badger vaccination programme that can be upscaled effectively (either via injectable or oral BadgerBCG vaccine) to prevent reinfection to badgers after the cattle transmission path is resolved.
- Roll out effective badger epidemiological surveillance so that badger vaccination can be deployed in high-risk areas.

Farming Industry

- Write to their MPs and MSs requesting further investment in biosecurity support and an effective cattle vaccine and testing protocol.

- Support and encourage participation in the CHeCS Herd Accreditation scheme and the TB Entry Level Membership programmes.
- Enhance biosecurity measures that are relevant to the scale and needs of each farm.
- Consider if husbandry methods are appropriate for the scale of farming, and reducing disease transmission and susceptibility.

Vets

- Provide sector-wide support with the appropriate skills investment to enable accurate veterinary support and advice to support the farming industry, regardless of the area of the country and bTB risk status, for example:
 - encourage more vets to become Accredited TB Advisors to help improve farmer-vet relations and veterinary expertise in bTB, including those in LRAs.
- Ensure strengthened collaborative working between government vets and private vets, with private vets taking more of a lead role in tackling bTB.

Nature-based NGOs

- Be proactive in using inclusive, evidence-based narratives to openly engage with diverse groups of stakeholders.
- Collaborate with government agencies, farmers, veterinary professionals, and other NGOs to create integrated strategies for bTB management that are science-based and sustainable.
- Invest in rural community development to address the polarisation of opinions surrounding the protection of the badger.
- Fund and encourage wildlife-proof measures on farms that encourage best practices for biosecurity and disease management, such as using electric fencing and raised troughs.
- Clearly identify their position on badger culling and bTB policy to their members and supporters to open the dialogue between stakeholders.