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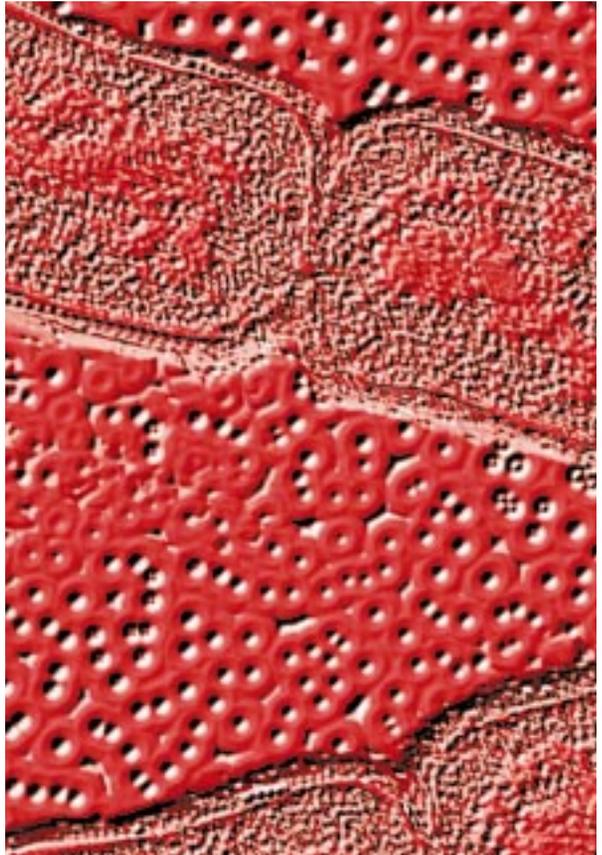


**ON
ANIMAL
HEALTH
AND
WELFARE**

TB

IN CATTLE

Reducing the Risk





TB: Reducing the Risk

Every year farmers lose millions of pounds from TB breakdowns. Each year the figure rises. More and more farmers are facing the worry of TB breakdowns. Do you want the stress and disruption TB brings?

We don't know all the reasons why some farms get TB and some do not, and we don't know the best way to stop the disease spreading. MAFF is spending over £11 million a year to try and find the answers to these questions.

Already, however, there are a number of steps farmers can take to reduce the chances that their animals will go down with TB. A separate leaflet suggests general disease control measures which will help against TB as well as other diseases.

This leaflet suggests measures more specifically directed at TB. These vary from some which are proven scientifically to some which are based on common sense or on the results of work done in other countries. Some may be impracticable on your particular farm; others may seem irrelevant to you if you are farming in one of the areas of the country where TB is not a serious problem. But the disease is spreading, and occasional breakdowns occur in every county.

You will need to think through what might be practicable for you, and discuss the possibilities with your veterinary surgeon.

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis in cattle is caused by the bacterium, *Mycobacterium bovis*, one of a family of bacteria which also cause Johne's disease in cattle and leprosy in people.

M. bovis has been found in several wild mammal species and in cats. It also infects people. Nowadays nearly all of human TB is caused by a different organism, but in the past *M. bovis* was a major cause of death in people in Britain.

Animals are probably more likely to be infected by *M. bovis* when they are poorly-nourished or under stress. When they are infectious they may pass the bacterium on in a number of ways - in their breath, saliva, urine or droppings. *M. bovis* can survive in the environment for several months, especially in moist, mild places like ill-ventilated cattle sheds.

Controlling tuberculosis

TB spreads between cattle slowly compared to some infections, but it will spread. That is why the government regularly tests cattle for TB using a skin test. Animals which react to the test are compulsorily slaughtered, and restrictions are placed so that animals may not move on or off the affected farm (except direct to slaughter under licence) until further tests show that the herd is clear. This process seriously disrupts farm business, and can be very expensive. Even farmers in areas with little history of TB breakdowns should therefore consider how they can help to keep TB out of their herds.

TB in cattle is complex, and a number of factors are involved. One way to stop cattle getting TB is to stop them coming into contact with *Mycobacterium bovis*. This means stopping the bacterium spreading between cattle, and spreading from wild animals to cattle.

The following pages give some suggestions on how you could reduce the risk of infection from these two sources.



Cattle to Cattle Spread

You should try to prevent contact between your cattle and those on neighbouring farms, and you should ensure as best you can that cattle coming on to your farm are healthy. We suggest you:

- **use sound fencing to stop nose to nose contact with other cattle**
- **place barriers in gateways to stop contact with passing cattle**
- **avoid common grazings; if you have to use them ask for skin tests to be synchronised**
- **consider moving to a closed herd system**
- **wherever possible breed your own replacements**
- **isolate any bought-in cattle**
- **consider a private TB test for all bought-in cattle. Your vet can advise you on how to do this**
- **ask when bought-in cattle were last tested for TB. If they need testing before your routine herd test, speak to your vet about a private test**
- **keep contract reared cattle away from your herd**
- **keep over winter housing well ventilated and dry**
- **tell your neighbours if you have a TB breakdown; that way they might tell you in turn and enable you to take precautions**

Spread from wildlife

Mycobacterium bovis has been found in several wild mammal species. The species found to have the highest rate of infection is the badger, although infection has also been found in deer and other animals. The consensus of scientific opinion is that badgers are a significant source of TB infection in cattle, although in areas where the badgers are not infected, they cannot pass the infection to cattle. Even where there is TB in the local badger population, there are many other factors which influence whether or not cattle become infected.

It makes sense to minimise direct contact between cattle and badgers, and contact between cattle and places where badgers live or may have left saliva, urine or faeces.

- **walk your farm to identify areas which badgers use**
- **keep wildlife out of buildings, especially feed stores and cattle housing**
- **raise feed and water troughs so that their lips are at least 80cm (30 inches) off the ground**
- **molasses feed blocks are a favourite food of badgers; ensure they are raised off the ground where badgers cannot get to them**
- **fence off the areas around setts to keep cattle out while allowing badgers free access**
- **if you have clusters of badger dung pits, consider fencing them off too**
- **avoid grass from badger latrines and field margins when cutting silage**
- **dispose safely of badger carcasses found on your farm. Use a face mask and gloves**

It is an offence to interfere with badgers or their setts without a licence. Contact your MAFF RSC or the Scottish or Welsh Office to ask about licences.



Other points

Insurance

Most insurance companies will include cover for TB losses as part of their farm policies. Obviously this will cost more in areas considered to be at high risk of TB, but it may well prove cheaper than an uninsured breakdown.

Helping MAFF to help you

MAFF is conducting a large-scale investigation to try and find out why some farms have TB and others do not. All farmers with TB found in their cattle will be asked to help complete a questionnaire on the farm, farm management practices, cattle, wildlife, and other factors which might influence the spread of the disease. We need to obtain similar information from other farms that have not had TB so that we can compare the two. If you are asked to help, please do so. The answers will be analysed and used to develop more focused guidance.