

PREPARING FOR A NEW GB STRATEGY ON BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION HELD BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT BETWEEN 9 FEBRUARY AND 4 JUNE 2004

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document is a summary of the responses received to the public consultation (*'preparing for a new GB strategy on bovine tuberculosis'*) held by the Welsh Assembly Government between 9 February and 4 June 2004.

1.2 The consultation period was extended by one month to 4 June 2004 to allow consultees to consider the recommendations and conclusions of the Independent Scientific Review of the Randomised Badger Culling Trial and Associated Epidemiological Research (the 'Godfray Review') which was published on 4 March 2004. Copies of the Review's Executive Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions were sent to all consultees on 28 April 2004.

1.3 The purpose of the consultation was to initiate work on implementing the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy in relation to bovine Tuberculosis (TB) by inviting the views of stakeholders on:

- the principles on which a new 10 year strategy should be based to achieve a sustainable control policy for bovine TB in GB, and
- detailed proposals for new short term measures to seek to control the geographic spread of bovine TB, particularly to areas where cattle are currently free of the disease.

1.4 Responses were received from 34 organisations and individuals and a list of these is included at Annex A. In addition 100 identical one-page responses were received from individuals mostly in Powys. A petition was also received from Livestock Farmers, Agricultural Merchants and others signed by 130 individuals.

1.5 Some respondents to the consultation submitted a 'free standing' response and did not answer the questions set out in the consultation document. In these circumstances every effort was made to link responses to specific questions, where appropriate. Where this was not possible the essence of such responses was fully considered.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1 There was strong support for the eradication of bovine TB rather than containment and for regional differentiation to reflect distribution of the disease. There was also a consensus that the science base should be developed to inform future strategy. Many respondents considered that the wildlife reservoir must be addressed as well as the transmission of TB amongst cattle.

2.2 As TB is a zoonosis and, therefore, a public health issue it was felt that the Government should intervene in bovine TB and fund the implementation of a TB Strategy. The need for farmers to improve livestock management and biosecurity and for healthy and for sustainable farming to be promoted was a recurring theme.

2.3 Unsurprisingly, the issue of badger culling produced a clear division of opinion between farming and wildlife interests. Farming interests were generally in favour of badger culling, particularly in hotspots, whilst wildlife interests were opposed - many suggested that it was inappropriate to do so in advance of the outcome of the Randomised Badger Culling Trials. Respondents thought that the Government should fund a badger management/culling not least to ensure high standards of animal welfare.

2.4 Most respondents supported the development of the gamma interferon test, better cattle movement restrictions and a vaccine for cattle and badgers, with a vaccine for cattle the preferred option although several respondents expressed concern about the acceptability to consumers of food from vaccinated cattle. Many considered the gamma interferon test would reduce the time herds spent under restriction.

2.5 Respondents are willing to participate in partnership arrangements to tackle bovine TB but suggested that it is for the Government to decide on a TB strategy, implement and defend it. There was strong support for the refocusing of the work of the TB Forum. There was also strong support for the 5 proposed measures to improve surveillance testing and for making the system more transparent. A majority favoured pre-movement testing of cattle moving from 1-2 year testing herds to other herds but issues were raised about the practicalities, additional cost, workload for farmers and the reliability of the skin test. Although there was strong support for post-movement testing by farmers, there were concerns about such testing being on a voluntary basis, the cost and the practicalities. It was suggested that the Government should fund post-movement testing.

2.6 The other options considered, including zoning etc, attracted a wide variety of views from respondents. The new proposals for the early detection and prevention of developing TB hotspots were supported but some thought them pointless unless the wildlife reservoir is addressed.

2.7 Regional TB fora were also held in Crickhowell, St Asaph and Carmarthen on 31 March and 1-2 April 2004. A summary of the issues raised at these fora is at Annex B.

3. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Question 1: Bearing in mind we are looking at what we might achieve in terms of bovine TB controls in the next 10 years, do you agree that the most realistic target has to be to contain and progressively reduce spread, incidence and economic costs of the disease and to continue to develop the science base to inform future strategy?

Eleven respondents agreed with the approach of containment and progressive reduction in the next 10 years whilst 111 disagreed and thought that eradication in 10 years or less should be the aim. The petition called for early eradication of the disease. One respondent suggested that trace element deficiency was an important factor in containing and controlling the disease. There appeared to be a wide consensus that the science base should continue to be developed to inform future strategy.

Question 2: In defining what we hope to achieve in terms of bovine TB disease control, to what extent should this be regionally differentiated to reflect the distribution of the disease?

Fourteen respondents specifically supported regional differentiation to reflect the distribution of the disease. Other points were that this should be to county if not parish level and that regional bovine TB groups should be established. It was also suggested that differentiation should be based on risk of transmission rather than geographical areas. One respondent disagreed, advocating a countrywide approach.

Question 3: How should the interests of wider society, and the principles of sustainability be recognised in a 10 year vision for bovine TB?

One hundred and five respondents agreed that in a 10-year vision, the wildlife reservoir of TB must be looked into as well as transmission of TB amongst cattle. One hundred and thirty respondents (again, including the identical letters) were of the opinion that from the public health perspective, as TB is a zoonosis, the Government should completely fund the new Strategy to control bovine TB. It was also suggested that the 10-year vision should be consistent with the aims of the Government's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. Education in relation to farm biosecurity and badger related measures were mentioned as possible ways of recognising the interests of the wider society.

Question 4: Does Government need to intervene in the control of bovine TB? If so, why, and to what extent? If not, why not?

Two hundred and fifty three respondents suggested that Government intervention is essential in order to control bovine TB. The remaining responses (mainly from badger groups) had not addressed the question at all. Twenty respondents agreed that Government intervention is required in order to ensure the farming industry plays a role in

minimising disease spread (through ensuring high standards of biosecurity are maintained). Fifteen respondents stated that the Government should intervene to protect public health, claiming that low levels of transference of TB between infected meat/milk to humans can only be maintained through Government intervention. Nine respondents stated that animal health and welfare must be protected by Government intervention.

Question 5: Who in your opinion are the main beneficiaries of current bovine TB controls and how should costs be shared between these beneficiaries?

Nineteen respondents specifically addressed this issue. The overriding view was that this is a public health issue and therefore the general public are the main beneficiaries. It was also suggested that all sectors benefit – the public through healthy milk/meat, farmers through healthier herds and the Government through a strong rural economy and international trade. The view was also expressed that farmers and vets were the main beneficiaries and also that no one benefits. The issue of cost sharing was not specifically addressed in many cases but on the basis that this is public health issue the majority of respondents appear to believe that the Government should bear the costs. Concern was expressed in the 100 identical letters about the ability of the industry to bear any additional costs.

Question 6: What contribution should the farming industry make to reduce the risks to their herd of bovine TB?

Twenty-one respondents specifically addressed this issue. The common theme from all these respondents is the need for farmers to improve livestock management, put in place effective and practicable biosecurity measures and for healthy and sustainable farming to be promoted. The point was made that this would result in healthier cattle better able to resist infection. It was also suggested that a system should be put in place for rewarding farmers who adopt such measures but with penalties for farmers for poor husbandry. One respondent thought that farmers should be compelled to comply with disease control/biosecurity measures. However, the view was also expressed that even the best biosecurity measures may not be effective in preventing ingress by wildlife into livestock areas. A respondent also suggested that farmers could do very little, as they cannot address the wildlife issue.

Question 7: Do you agree that, in the light of current evidence, policies should be developed (including badger culling) that seek to control transmission of bovine TB between badgers and cattle?

One hundred and seventeen respondents agreed that policies should be developed that seek to control the transmission of bovine TB between badgers and cattle and that badger culling in hotspot areas should be taken forward. Ten respondents were supportive of the Government developing policies to seek to control bovine TB transmission between badger and cattle but badger culling should be avoided at all costs due to the lack of scientific evidence to implicate badgers with disease transmission to cattle. Respondents suggested other policies, including pre-movement testing, developing the gamma

interferon test and imposing movement restrictions on cattle where TB tests are overdue. Two respondents stated that there was no justification at all for developing policies to control bovine TB transmission between badgers and cattle when the extent and significance of transmission (if it takes place at all) remains unknown. These respondents also thought that resources should be put into research and implementing policy that reduces the spread of bovine TB between cattle. One respondent suggested that the Voluntary Sector should be involved in the first stages of policy development.

Question 8: Should we consider introducing, in conjunction with badger control/management, better controls on the disease in cattle using, for example, the gamma interferon test?

Fifteen respondents specifically addressed and supported the issue of introducing better controls on the disease in cattle using the gamma interferon test. This was on the proviso that the gamma interferon test is researched further and is subject to satisfactory outcome in relation to accuracy. It was also mentioned that the gamma interferon test should be used as an adjunct to the skin test while further investigation into its accuracy is researched. Pre-movement testing and cattle vaccination to be implemented in conjunction with badger control/management was also suggested as a means of better control of the disease in cattle. Thirteen respondents thought that such measures to control the disease in cattle should be employed, but not in conjunction with badger controls as there is not enough evidence that these measures are effective.

Question 9: Under what circumstances would a badger culling or management policy be acceptable?

This question was specifically addressed by 22 respondents and there was, not surprisingly, a clear division of opinion between farming and wildlife interests. A majority of respondents were in favour of a badger culling or management policy including those who submitted the identical letter. However, in most cases this was conditional on a number of factors, including that any badger culling policy should:

- Be limited to hotspot areas/infected farms and only if all other measures to control the spread of TB had also been implemented.
- Be based on clear scientific evidence and not in advance of the RBCT report and/or the results of the Irish Trials
- Properly resourced and managed
- Benefit the overall viability of the badger population
- Take account of the welfare interests of the badger

There was concern that in the light of the increasing incidence of bovine TB an interim badger culling strategy should be introduced now in hotspots and areas of infection in advance of the RBCT report which is due in 2006. Those respondents opposed to such

policy were of the view that culling badgers would not eliminate bovine TB; that there is a lack of scientific evidence for its effectiveness; that it is a waste of public money; and, that a vaccine is the best approach coupled with contraception in areas of high population density.

Question 10: How would any badger management/culling be organised, monitored and evaluated? Who should pay?

Eight respondents stated that the case to cull badgers is not good enough and should not be undertaken until there is conclusive evidence that badgers increase the spread of bovine TB (from RBCT). However, if badger management becomes essential, the Government must organise and finance it to ensure high standards of animal welfare are maintained. A further 112 respondents suggested that it is the responsibility of the Government to organise badger management/culling and to finance it, should the need arise. Nine of these respondents thought that the Government should provide farmers with licences in order to control badgers. A further 6 respondents took the view that farmers should not be given licences to shoot badgers due to animal welfare concerns. These respondents did not put forward any other suggestions for the Government to undertake to organise badger control. Two respondents stated that badger management should be organised by farmers themselves. One respondent also suggested that farmers should finance badger management themselves if there was inconclusive evidence that badgers increase the spread of bovine TB. This respondent stated that the costs should be split between the Government and farmers, should badgers be proved to increase spread of the disease. Sixteen respondents stated that badger management should be monitored independently and animal health and welfare standards along with efficacy of badger control should be assessed.

Question 11: If proactive badger culling is not shown in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial to be effective, what other action should be taken to control the spread of bovine TB in cattle?

The majority of respondents were in favour of the following:

- Improved testing and diagnostics regime for cattle, including use of the gamma interferon test.
- Introduction of better cattle movement restrictions.
- Development of a vaccine for cattle and badgers.

A lesser number of respondents were in favour of:

- Ensuring better biosecurity on farms and ensuring badgers do not gain access to buildings and troughs etc.
- Ensuring good herd health.

- Improved disease surveillance.
- More frequent testing of cattle.
- Improved animal husbandry.
- More research into pre-movement testing.

A minority of respondents mentioned:

- Encouraging organic farming and other extensive, wildlife friendly systems.
- Investigating wildlife vectors of TB (other than badgers).
- Improved delivery of TB controls with the use of lay testers.
- Education and training for farmers.
- Encouraging use of isolation facilities.
- Use of the single intradermal caudal fold test, introduced as an intermediate in annual testing regimes.
- Research into cattle-cattle transmission.
- Increased funding for Tir Gorfal and other agri-environmental schemes.
- Encouraging 'green tourism' on farms.
- Requiring farmers in TB hotspot areas to change their farming system from cattle to arable and if necessary the Government to provide incentives.
- Looking into animal resistance.

Question 12: On the basis of scientific evidence to date, how should Government focus research efforts on vaccines? Wider views on the prospects for vaccination would be welcomed.

Nineteen respondents addressed this question specifically. There was an overall consensus that an effective vaccine for badgers or cattle should be developed as quickly as possible and that sufficient resources should be devoted for this purpose. A cattle vaccine was thought to be the better option because of delivery issues with badgers. It was suggested that there should be full co-operation at an international level with other countries undertaking work to develop a vaccine. The trials in Ireland on a badger vaccine should be closely monitored, however, one respondent would not support field trials of a badger vaccine if it involved killing badgers. Ring vaccination around new hotspots as they occur was suggested as an effective use of a cattle vaccine. Concerns were expressed

that development work on a vaccine in the longer term should not rule out other short-term action to reduce the spread of the disease now. One respondent thought that an effective vaccine may never be found and that it would be better to boost cattle immune systems with trace element nutrition and better stock management to avoid stress. A generally held view, if a cattle vaccine is developed, is the need to educate supermarkets and consumers about the acceptability of vaccinated cattle. Some respondents thought this should not be a problem as food animals are already vaccinated against a number of diseases.

Question 13: How should the gamma interferon diagnostic test for cattle be used or developed in GB – to reduce the time herds spend under restriction by increasing the number of animals taken as reactors, to deal rapidly with herd breakdowns outside existing TB hotspot areas and/or to distinguish between vaccinated and infected animals?

The twenty respondents to this question were generally in favour of the use and further development of the gamma interferon test which some regarded as having key advantages over the skin test. Several favoured the use of the test in all of the circumstances mentioned in Question 13 but a reduction in the time herds spend under restriction by increasing the number of animals taken as reactors appeared to command the most support. One respondent expressed concern about the welfare of animals spending long periods of time under restriction. If the test was used it was suggested that it would lead to an initial rise in compensation costs but this would be more than justified in long term savings. The point was made that the SVS should be adequately resourced for testing. It was suggested that it was still unclear whether the gamma interferon test gave more accurate results than the skin test even when used in conjunction with it and that it was vital that farmers and wildlife interests had confidence in the testing regime. The field trials were raised by several respondents who expressed the view that more farms should be recruited and that the reluctance on the part of some farmers to co-operate may stem from a fear that the trials could end prematurely. One respondent also questioned the validity of the current field trials and their ability to inform future policy.

Question 14: What could 'effective partnership' mean in relation to bovine TB and what contribution could your organisation make to this?

Seventeen respondents addressed this Question. There is a clear willingness by the organisations that responded to participate in any structures that are put in place to take forward a bovine TB strategy. Suggestions included a Devolved TB Management Board and a Welsh Stakeholders Group. Key themes from respondents were the need for effective communication from and between stakeholders, including Government, and for approaches to be based on good science applied with commercial reality. A shared vision and agreed approach was felt to be important and that effective partnership would allow all stakeholders to be a partner on the basis of the contribution they can make. However, the point was also made that this is not area where consensus is likely to be reached and effective partnership should not disguise the need for clear responsibilities. Government must be prepared to decide on a strategy for tackling bovine TB, implement and defend it. It would be for Government to take the difficult and balanced decision on the way forward.

Question 15: What should be the Governance arrangements for a new TB strategy?

Twenty four respondents responded to this question, the majority of which stated that the new TB Strategy should be a partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government and stakeholders including livestock keepers, vets, consumers, animal welfare, wildlife organisations and Government agencies. A number of these respondees suggested that Regional Groups led by the Assembly be established to govern the Strategy at regional level. Four respondents suggested that governance of the new strategy should be the responsibility of the TB Forum. An equal number of respondents were against this proposal. Other suggestions for strategy governance include implementing the Godfray proposal for a senior figure at Defra to take ownership of the programme and for a Welsh Stakeholder's Group to solely govern the strategy.

Question 16: Should the remit of the TB Forum be recast, for example, to have a focus on communicating results of the research programme as recommended by EFRAC?

Fifteen respondents specifically answered this question. Nine respondents stated that the terms of reference of the TB Forum should be re-addressed, to maximise the scope and effectiveness of the group. These respondees stated that the TB forum should focus on dissemination of information to farmers and interested parties, as there is currently a lack of information readily available e.g. progress reports in respect of research being undertaken. Six respondents stated that the current objectives of the TB Forum were unclear and they were unaware of the value of the group.

Question 17: We have proposed five measures that are aimed to improve our surveillance testing and make the system more transparent. Are these measures appropriate, should any be changed and if so what should the changes be?

Twenty-four respondents addressed this question. Most were generally in favour of the five measures proposed including adoption of Directive EC 64/432/EEC. Some respondents thought that there should be a local risk-based assessment of testing intervals rather than that laid down in the Directive and others that annual herd testing should be introduced using lay testers as necessary. Several respondents suggested that the parish should be retained as the base unit and that discretion should be given to local DVMs to increase testing frequency in response to local disease patterns. There was concern that any new measures should be communicated and explained clearly to farmers. Several respondents made the point that the fourth measure should be subject to progress with the Gamma Interferon test. Also in relation to the fourth measure, one respondent thought that IRs should be removed following the second test. It was also suggested that the definition of reformed herds (referred to in the fifth proposed measure) needs to be clear. A respondent was also of the view that the current testing frequencies were still appropriate and it was the delays in removing reactors from farms that required urgent attention. The point was also made that farmed deer should also be subject to compulsory testing.

Question 18: What are your views on our proposal to reduce the risk of spreading TB from high to low incidence areas by requiring pre-movement testing of all cattle moving from 1-2 year testing herds to other herds?

Twenty respondents addressed this question. Almost all of these were in favour of the proposal. Those in favour were concerned that there should also be improved testing techniques including use of the Gamma Interferon test in conjunction with the skin test. Several respondents were in favour of the proposal for pre-movement testing but that the Government should fund these tests for the duration of the 10-year strategy. One respondent thought that the proposal could be supported but only as part of a holistic approach to the eradication of TB in bovines/wildlife. Those not supporting the proposal pointed to the practical difficulties in introducing pre-movement testing, that these would outweigh the benefits and to concerns about the reliability of the current skin test. Concerns were also expressed in the identical letter about the workload this proposal would place on farmers and the possible additional expense to farmers who may be struggling to run a viable business.

Question 19: What are your views on our advice that farmers should themselves apply post-movement testing in order to minimise the risk of transfer of disease from high to low incidence areas?

Nineteen respondents addressed this question. The majority of these respondents endorsed the Assembly's advice that farmers should apply post-movement testing in order to minimise the risk of transfer of disease. Concerns were raised about the likelihood of farmers opting to undertake post-movement testing on a voluntary basis but some respondents emphasised the point that post-movement testing should be carried out as a good practice measure by farmers regardless of Assembly advice. Most of these respondents thought that the Government should fund post-movement testing. Respondents raised concerns about the resources required to carry out post-movement testing on a large scale. A small number of farmers considered the introduction of post-movement testing to be impractical for farmers, arguing that a high standard of biosecurity would be difficult to achieve on farm due to the lack of isolation facilities available. A small number of respondents were of the opinion that post-movement testing is worthless as once an infected animal arrives on the farm it would be too late to stop the disease from spreading to other animals. Three respondents considered the advice from the Assembly 'not good enough' as such a regime would increase the movement of people onto a farm thus potentially spreading all manner of diseases. One respondent suggested that business incentives and encouragement by the Government is required in order to promote self-help. A small number of respondents suggested that pre and post movement testing should be considered as a means of tightly controlling the spread of the disease.

Question 20: What are your views on the other options we have considered?

- zoning – banning all cattle movements from areas of high TB incidence to areas of

- low TB incidence without some form of risk assessment and assurance testing;
- post movement testing for all cattle moving from 1 and 2 year testing herds moving to 3 and 4 year testing herds;
 - pre-movement testing for all cattle moving from 1 and 2 year testing herds and subsequent post movement testing at all 3 and 4 year testing receiving herds;
 - pre and post movement testing for all cattle sold for breeding and production regardless of herd of origin and destination; and
 - a pre-movement testing system based upon herd TB history, cattle to be tested that come from herds that have experienced an outbreak in the past five years.

Zoning – Eleven respondents specifically addressed this option. Five respondents stated that this option is worthy of consideration and is a sensible way forward as long as there is clarity over the definition of areas of high and low TB incidence. Due regard must be given to farmers in high TB incidence areas whose cattle have never been infected with TB. Six respondents believed that this option was impractical and a bad idea as there would be serious marketing consequences for farmers in areas of high TB incidence. Zoning would also be very difficult to implement due to the difficulty in deciding where to draw the line between areas of high and low TB incidence. Some respondents stated that this option should only be considered as one aspect of a comprehensive TB control programme.

Post-movement testing for all cattle moving from 1 and 2 year testing herds moving to 3 and 4 year testing herds – Twelve respondents addressed this option. Seven stated that post-movement testing would be an impractical option towards controlling the spread of TB due to ineffective isolation facilities available on most farms. Respondents highlighted the fact that when an infected animal arrives on a farm, testing it for TB is irrelevant as the disease would have started to spread unless the animal is adequately isolated. Five respondents stated that post-movement testing, with adequate isolation, would be of benefit in order to control the spread of TB amongst cattle. Many thought post-movement testing should be made mandatory rather than advisory.

Pre-movement testing for all cattle moving from 1 and 2 year testing herds and subsequent post-movement testing at all 3 and 4 year testing receiving herds – Eight respondents specifically answered this question. Most responded positively towards the pre-movement testing aspect, but failed to see the relevance of post-movement testing.

Pre and post-movement testing for all cattle sold for breeding and production regardless of herd of origin and destination – Eight respondents addressed this question, all of whom responded very positively to this proposed method of TB control. A number of respondents specifically recognised the importance of this option as far as breeding bulls are concerned.

Pre-movement testing system based upon herd TB history, cattle to be tested that come from herds that have experienced an outbreak in the past five years – Nine respondents responded to this question. The majority were against this option, stating that it ignores the possible contribution of wildlife or exogenous infection in herd breakdowns and it does not embrace pre-movement testing of all cattle moving out of high risk areas.

A small number responded positively towards this option provided that the wildlife role in TB transmission is taken into account.

Four respondents fully endorsed all of the above options. And one respondent did not endorse any due to the unknown impact on farming systems.

Question 21: How effective do you think the new proposals for the early detection and prevention of developing TB hotspots will be?

Thirteen respondents specifically addressed this question. Most agreed that early detection of TB in herds is paramount in preventing further spread of the disease and a reliable diagnostic test is key in this objective. Six respondents stated that unless the wildlife aspect of bovine TB transmission is addressed, no cattle measures, no matter how rigorous, will be effective in preventing emergence of new TB hotspots. Most respondents support the measures proposed in the consultation document, especially cattle movement controls, accurate diagnostics and more frequent TB testing regimes. A number of respondents suggested that if all possible testing was being carried out (pre and post-movement testing), new TB hotspots should not develop. One respondent stated that the proposals set out in the consultation document would go a long way to preventing new TB hotspots emerging, but anergic animals (animals that are 'silent' carriers of TB, who show no signs of harbouring the disease and when tested, prove to be TB free, but infect other cattle), need to be looked into and a test to distinguish these animals from TB free animals needs to be developed.

ANNEX A

ADAS Wales
Badger Watch and Rescue Dyfed
Brecknock Wildlife Trust
Country Land and Business Association Wales
Clwyd Badger Group
Countryside Alliance
Countryside Council for Wales
Dinah Williams
Edward Solomon
Farm Animal Welfare Council
Farmers' Union of Wales
Farming and Livestock Concern UK
Food Standards Agency
Glamorgan Badger Group
Gwent Badger Groups
Margaret Hunt
Martin Hancox
Meat Promotion Wales/Hybu Cig Cymru
National Federation of Badger Groups
National Public Health Service for Wales
NFU Wales
Powys County Council
Radnorshire Badger Group
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers
RSPCA
S J Howells
The Association of Welsh Badger Groups
The Royal Welsh Agricultural Society Ltd
Tudor, Lawson, Dallimore and Parry (Veterinary Surgery)
Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Welsh Agri-food Partnership Organic Strategy Group
Welsh Black Cattle Society
Wildlife Trust in Wales

Annex B

Regional TB Fora Crickhowell, St Asaph and Carmarthen – 31 March, 1-2 April 2004

1. Current Strategy

What we should keep

- Government Financial Support i.e. compensation.
- Keep current testing of cattle, but also test badgers for TB. Increase testing regime to either annual or bi-annual.
- Protect human health.
- Protection of animal health – wildlife and cattle.
- Ensure research into TB and a TB vaccine continues. Continuation of the Krebs' trials to find out whether randomised badger culling effects TB incidence. A select number of people agreed that this practice should not be done in Wales.

What we should lose

- Poor feedback to farmers regarding incidences of TB and progress made towards a vaccine. Farmers need better communication links with the Assembly so they are kept informed on what is going on.
- The long time delay between testing and obtaining the results.
- Testing fallen badger/road casualty badgers only in hotspots. They should be tested throughout Wales.
- Inconclusive results should be classified as being 'TB clear'.
- Slow removal of reactors from herds. Reactors should be removed from the farm a lot quicker than they are currently being removed. Adjoining farms should also be tested quicker.
- The half-hearted approach to eradicating TB must be stepped up in order to start controlling the disease.
- Stop playing catch-up when it comes to TB. Wales needs to stay ahead by researching TB, looking into the interaction between cattle and badgers, put more resources into

developing a vaccine and looking into the contribution cattle movement makes to the movement of TB around Wales.

- Stop looking at badgers as being the sole vectors of bTB. A wider view must be taken and parameters should be extended to look at other wildlife as vectors.

2. Future Vision

Regarding TB, where do we want to be in 10 years time, how will we get there and what are the barriers that may prevent us from getting there?

In 2014:

- We want to be in control of TB/have 100% 'clean' cattle and wildlife.
- We want to be at the stage we were at 10 years ago.
- We want to have a uniform strategy throughout Great Britain.
- In 10 years there should be a greatly improved knowledge of TB.
- To have a better test for TB than the current one with 100% accuracy.
- We need to be in a position whereby we can stop TB entering the UK after eradication.
- Have a reliable vaccine in place

How will we get there:

- By testing other wildlife and researching the TB vector(s). Possibility of testing live badgers.
- Accurate TB test results need to be received quickly in order to removal reactors quicker from farms
- By testing road casualty badgers as soon as possible especially in hotspot areas.
- Improved removal/faster removal of road casualty badgers.
- Maintenance of 'clean' areas.
- 12 month cattle testing regime.
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages of using the gamma interferon test as well as the skin test.
- By putting a stop to uncontrolled cattle movements.

- Consider a vaccine as a means of controlling TB. The possibility for a vaccine for all animal species.
- Better communication and co-operation between wildlife organisations.
- Ensure decisions are based on fact and not anecdotal evidence.
- Reaction to TB hotspots more quickly and prioritising testing in these areas.
- By taking a proactive approach.
- Use of lay testers to make diagnoses (farmers must have confidence in lay testers). TB to be part of a control strategy whereby lay testers work with vets. The British Veterinary Association needs to realise the importance of employing lay testers and work with the Welsh Assembly Government.
- By concentrating more on eradication of TB and not just controlling the disease.
- By implementing the Irish strategy for TB eradication in the UK.
- Find out how TB was eradicated in other countries and in Britain in 1950s.

Barriers:

- Cost.
- Lack of research/resources available.
- Public acceptance of meat if vaccinated.
- Legal problems – if badgers are culled it contravenes the Berne Convention.
- Genetic mutation of bacteria to become resistant to vaccine.
- The practicalities of culling infected wildlife.
- Exporting live cattle to Europe.
- Withdrawal of Government funding.
- Lack of co-operation between parties.

3. Opinions on the proposal for pre-movement testing of animals moving from 1-2 year testing herds to other herds

For:

- A definite 'yes' as it lowers the risk of 'clean' farms, if done as part of an overall strategy.
- Pre-movement testing would help to monitor and keep track of the disease.
- Certification (passports) could be used to show that an animal has been tested. This would instil confidence in farmers bringing new cattle on to their farms. They would know it would be 'clean'.
- It is a practical method of testing if herd is to be dispersed, but would not cover store cattle.
- There would be no stigma attached to animals that undergo different testing regimes if all animals are tested prior to being moved.

Against:

- Impractical and very difficult to properly implement.
- There will be huge costs for this testing regime, especially if vets will be carrying it out.
- There was concern that costs for the extra testing would fall upon farmers.
- If this pre-movement testing comes into force, more resources will be required to cope with the extra tests. There would not be enough vets to test the animals. There is possibility of lay testers being employed, but farmers want qualified vets to make diagnoses, so lay testers were not favourable.
- Concern there would be a reduction in the number of markets.
- There is also concern that a 2-tier market would result from pre-movement testing between animals tested annually and those tested bi-annually. This is highly opposed.
- There is concern that producers could be more greatly disadvantaged in some areas than others.
- There could be problems with over-testing of cattle. This could make it more difficult to detect TB in less responsive cattle.
- Pre-movement testing would deter trade in cattle.

Discussion

- The reservoir of infection of TB is not being addressed. The question was asked 'what would be the point in testing if the TB vector was not being considered'?

- If pre-movement testing is implemented, the accuracy of the current test needs to be addressed.
- It was the general opinion that if pre-movement testing was to be implemented, the Welsh Assembly Government should find a way of paying for it. It was pointed out that if resources are put in now, the results in the long-term would more than compensate.

OPEN FORUM

TB eradication.

- Strong scientific knowledge as well as a common sense approach should be relied on in order to get 'on top' of TB.
- There was a suggestion to look at Ireland and how TB eradication is being researched there. Publications on this research must be seen and if models of eradication are robust enough to implement in Wales, then they should be.
- The vast amount of bureaucracy should be addressed in order to develop a workable solution.

Are there enough resources to go into a yearly testing programme?

Issues arising:

- Some consultees were of the opinion that introduction of pre-movement testing will clog up the whole system and that the only solution is to test annually. This would make it easier to see where the problem areas are and then the reasons behind them could be investigated.
- Many resources needed.
- In areas where large animal vet numbers have declined it would be difficult to find required resources to implement yearly testing.
- Possibility of employing lay testers to test instead of vets. This is out to consultation at the moment. As discussed previously this proved undesirable to farmers who want a qualified vet making the decisions, instead of someone who has no true knowledge of TB.
- The point was made that if the agriculture industry is healthy there will be enough vets.
- Most farmers would accept a yearly test for TB, but a move away from beef farming is envisaged if pre-movement testing is ongoing due to the increased stress on farmers and animals.

- Farmers cannot be expected to pay if they do not know for sure if TB will be eradicated. Farmers are willing to pay a levy as long as there is proof the work being done is working towards TB eradication.

The reservoir of infection of TB must be found and then a strategy to eradicate TB can be implemented based upon the findings.

- Many fingers pointed to badgers at this stage and there was an argument in their defence that badger populations have been stable for years even while incidences of TB have been ever increasing.
- The general opinion amongst consultees is that there needs to be scientific evidence that badgers are the vectors of TB and then badger groups would agree to culling. However, there is no evidence to suggest that badger culling will have an effect on bTB incidence. A badger cull would only be justified if it will work. Krebs' Trial results need to be seen
- Other possible vectors of TB need to be looked into e.g. deer

A TB vaccine is 10 years away. Why?

- Many resources are needed to be invested in finding a suitable vaccine. It will be very costly. There is not enough scientific information available at the moment.
- Resources are going into researching relationships between cattle and badgers and not enough time and money is being spent on developing the vaccine.
- Questions need to be answered which take time to research. For example, what is the value of the animal after vaccination? Will it lose value? What would be the effect on the carcass?
- What will be the effect of the vaccine on wildlife?
- There also needs to be a test to distinguish between vaccinated and unvaccinated animals.

Payments for compensation – no decisions have been made as yet, but it is out for consultation.

- Payment rates have to be researched and have to be justified according to the market value of the infected cattle, and not other losses.

Hire bulls.

- Would annual testing be sufficient for hire bulls moving from farm to farm on a regular basis? The general opinion was that it would not be sufficient. Pre-movement testing of hire bulls would be a better option.

Parish systems.

- There should be a buffer zone between parishes in order to prevent a low risk parish being situated next to a high-risk parish

