

SCOTTISH BADGERS

PRESS STATEMENT

SCOTLAND IS BOVINE TB FREE

Scotland has had official bovine TB free status since 2009 which means that its bovine TB level is <0.1% over 6 years and that appropriate disease surveillance is carried out in cattle herds which includes pre- and post-movement testing, slaughter inspection and the use of a high sensitivity test (the interferon-gamma test) to ensure fast removal of infected cattle from a herd.

Scotland's Official TB free status was achieved through the application of stringent cattle-based measures over a long period of time. Official DEFRA National Statistics confirm year on year that in Scotland the herd incidence is very low and stable.

In Cumbria the situation is a complete contrast. DEFRA's monitoring agency warned farmers back in 2015 that some cattle traders have been persistently bringing in cattle from High Risk Areas in high numbers to be sold through Cumbrian markets.

Despite a warning about the risk this introduction of cattle from high risk areas has carried on and around 6 new cattle herds each year continue to be infected with bovine TB in Cumbria. In 2017 a strain of bovine TB in a cow in Cumbria was shown to have come from Northern Ireland which is a high risk area.

Trading in cattle results in constant movements of cattle around the UK in large numbers. At the same time the low sensitivity skin test for bovine TB used routinely in England leaves around a fifth of TB infected cattle un-detected in the herds to spread the infection. Cattle movements are by far the biggest risk factor in the spread of bovine TB.

In complete contrast wildlife does not move around the UK. The stable social structure of badgers in particular means that one badger family occupies the same territory for generation after generation.

in Scotland bovine TB infection is not a problem either in badgers or cattle. It is in no-one's interest to allow some traders to introduce cattle from high risk areas into Scotland. Retaining Scotland's OTF (Officially TB Free) status is important for our world trading status.

In the high risk areas of England research shows that more frequent cattle tests are 26 times more effective than culling badgers in controlling bovine TB. The BCG vaccination is effective in preventing cattle from contracting and spreading the infection but has not yet been introduced as part of the DEFRA strategy for controlling bovine TB in herds.

There are bigger problems affecting cattle than bovine TB that need to be addressed and treated – 5 times more cattle in the UK are slaughtered annually because of mastitis (51,000) and 7 times more through not being in calf (75,000).

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