

“Bovine TB at ten year low, but we must work together to eliminate disease” – Wales’ Chief Veterinary Officer

Speaking at NFU Cymru’s Pembrokeshire Annual General Meeting last night, the Chief Vet highlighted the progress made, with over 95% of Wales’ herds now TB free.

The Chief Vet also pointed to the increase in cattle slaughtered and stressed that although still a cause for concern, it did not reflect a worsening situation as is often reported.

Instead, the rise is due to an increase in the use of the more sensitive gamma interferon blood test and more severe interpretation of the skin test, both of which are flagging infected cattle in herds with a history of bovine TB at an earlier stage.

This increased sensitivity of testing helps to identify infection sooner and reduces the spread of the disease. The number of cattle slaughtered is expected to fall over time as a result of this approach, and as the number of infected herds continues to reduce.

The Chief Vet also highlighted the Cabinet Secretary’s position on controlling the disease in wildlife, saying an “England-style” cull had been ruled out in Wales.

The Randomised Badger Culling Trial in England showed a net reduction of 16% of new incidents of bovine TB over nine years. In Wales, the number of new incidents recorded has reduced by 47% in eight years through application of increased testing frequency, improved biosecurity and other cattle control measures alone. However, it is recognised that in a number of long term TB breakdowns the disease picture points towards a wildlife reservoir of infection.

As a result the Cabinet Secretary has proposed a measured response to controlling the disease in wildlife in Wales. Focussing on these persistent TB breakdowns, where it can be objectively proven badgers are infected, it is proposed the infected groups of badgers are trapped and humanely killed.

The Chief Veterinary Officer reported that work has already started to develop bespoke action plans for each herd, including addressing any wildlife contribution to the problem.

Speaking at the conference, Christianne Glossop said:

“We all recognise bovine TB has a significant financial and social

impact on farm businesses and the wider rural economy. While it is encouraging to see the number of new herd incidents falling, even in our highest incidence areas, I recognise this is of little comfort to the farms currently suffering a TB breakdown. This is why we are focusing our efforts on eliminating the disease in affected herds.”

“The public consultation on our proposed Refreshed Approach to TB eradication is now closed and we welcome the responses we have received. We are committed to eradicating the disease in Wales, but we cannot do this alone. It’s encouraging NFU Cymru has welcomed the plans for a regionalised approach, as this is aimed at protecting the low incidence area while bearing down on the disease elsewhere. This will help us to build on the progress made so far as we progress towards our ambition of a TB free Wales.”

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, is considering all response to the consultation on the Welsh Government’s refreshed Bovine TB Eradication Programme. The refreshed programme is expected to be published in the spring.