

Green light for ground-breaking bovine TB vaccine field trials

World-leading bovine tuberculosis (bTB) TB cattle vaccination trials are set to get underway in England and Wales as a result of a major breakthrough by government scientists.

These trials enable work to accelerate towards planned deployment of a cattle vaccine by 2025, in the latest milestone to eradicate this highly damaging animal disease.

bTB is one of the most difficult and intractable animal health challenges that England and Wales face today. More than 40,000 cattle are slaughtered each year due to infection from bTB. However, a cattle vaccine could become a powerful tool in the battle against the disease following the necessary testing and subsequent approvals to ensure its safety and efficacy.

It is one of several key elements of the long-term bTB strategy to eradicate the disease in England by 2038. Measures include plans to phase out intensive badger culling in England, improve the cattle testing regime and vaccinate more badgers against the disease and improved testing to intercept bTB earlier.

The field trials will be conducted over the next four years on behalf of Defra, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government, following 20 years of ground-breaking research into bovine TB vaccines and diagnostic tests.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Bovine TB is a slow-moving and insidious disease which can cause considerable trauma for farmers as they suffer the loss of highly prized animals and valued herds.

This scientific breakthrough is a major step forwards in our battle to see the disease eradicated from this country. As wider preventative measures like cattle vaccines are introduced, we will accelerate other elements of our strategy and start to phase out badger culling in England, as no one wants to continue the cull of a protected species indefinitely.

The UK Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

The Animal Plant and Health Agency's ground-breaking research has been pivotal in developing this potential vaccine. Whilst there is no single way to combat this damaging and complex disease, cattle vaccination is a potential new tool for our multi-pronged approach to tackle it and importantly prevent it, providing vital support to

our farming communities.

Bovine TB presents a global challenge and the UK has harnessed its world-leading science to develop potential solutions such as vaccination and new diagnostic tests that could also be valuable to other countries.

Development of a deployable cattle BTB vaccine was a top priority outlined in the [government's response to an independent review of its 25 year bTB strategy](#), led by Professor Sir Charles Godfray. The response to the Godfray Review set out plans to phase out intensive culling in the next few years, and outlined the need for a combined approach which includes badger and cattle vaccination to eradicate the disease in England by 2038.

British Veterinary Association Junior Vice President James Russell said:

The deployment of a viable cattle vaccine used in combination with a validated DIVA test has the potential to be an absolute game changer in our efforts to control and eradicate bovine tuberculosis, and is something that our own expert bTB working group's upcoming report has identified as a key priority.

These field trials mark the culmination of years of ground-breaking research and efforts by the veterinary scientific community to expand the range of tools available to vets and farmers to tackle bovine tuberculosis.

The latest statistics on bTB in England show the overall number of new herd incidents of the disease is down by 9% in the last year (to Nov 2019), a 10% reduction in the number of herds not officially free of the disease and a 4% reduction in the total number of animals slaughtered due to the disease. Full details of [these statistics are available here](#).