

[Press release: New data shows drop in bovine TB as further measures to fight disease unveiled](#)

Reductions in new outbreaks of bovine TB have been recorded in Gloucestershire and Somerset following the completion of their licensed four-year badger culls, Farming Minister George Eustice has announced.

The data published today shows there has been a decline in TB incidence in the first two cull areas with the rate of new confirmed breakdowns now at about half the level they were before culling began. In the Gloucestershire cull area, TB incidence has fallen from 10.4% before culling started to 5.6% in year four of the cull, while in Somerset it has reduced from 24% to 12%.

The findings are in line with expectation based on the scientific evidence from the Randomised Badger Culling Trial which underpins the approach to tackling bovine TB – and demonstrate progress is being made in delivering the 25-year TB eradication strategy in England to rid our farmers of the impacts of this terrible disease.

In a further move to strengthen the [government's 25-year bTB eradication strategy](#), the Minister of State has also announced the opening of a new round of applications for Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme grants.

[Licences have also been published](#) for badger control in 10 new areas within the High Risk Area, covering parts of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Staffordshire and Gloucestershire, plus one additional licence for badger control in Cumbria to eradicate a pocket of infection in both cattle and badgers in the TB Low Risk Area. Along with six-monthly cattle testing, movement restrictions and good biosecurity on farms, this offers the best opportunity to deal quickly with this localised threat.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

Today's figures showing reductions in TB cases in Somerset and Gloucestershire are evidence that our strategy for dealing with this slow moving, insidious disease is delivering results.

Bovine TB remains one of the greatest animal health threats to the UK. There is no single measure that will provide an easy answer which is why we are committed to pursuing a wide range of interventions to protect the future of our dairy and beef industries and eradicate the disease within 20 years.

No one wants to be culling badgers forever so the progress reported today is encouraging.

The Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme, which was suspended for two years following a global vaccine shortage before resuming in 2017, is open for expressions of interest from today with grant funding of up to 50% of costs – worth £700,000 over four years – available to private groups wishing to carry out badger vaccination in the Edge Area.

The scheme, which funded three projects over the course of the past 12 months, aims to create a protected badger population between the High Risk and Low Risk Areas of England and prevent further spread of the disease. New projects would start in spring 2019.

TB data from the eight other cull areas that have held licences for two or three years is also published today. While it is too early to expect to see any drop in those areas, we would hope to see a similar pattern to Somerset and Gloucestershire in coming years. A full scientific paper will be published in due course.

England has the highest incidence of bovine TB in Europe and the disease costs taxpayers over £100million every year. In 2017 more than 33,000 cattle had to be slaughtered in England to control the disease, causing devastation and distress for farmers and rural communities.

Earlier this year the government announced [a review of its 25 year Bovine TB strategy](#). The review, chaired by Sir Charles Godfray, is due to report to ministers at the end of the month.

Chief Vet Christine Middlemiss said:

Taking comprehensive action to prevent bovine TB infection of cattle from the reservoir of disease in local badger populations is an essential part of the government's 25-year strategy to eradicate the disease in England.

Proactive badger control is currently the best available option. Supported by tighter cattle controls including in those areas seeing a reduction in cattle-badger-cattle infection, improved biosecurity and vaccination, the licensing of further areas is necessary to realise disease control benefits across England.

Five years into our 25-year bovine TB eradication strategy it is timely to reflect on the next steps and I look forward to Sir Charles Godfray and his team reporting to ministers later this month.

Read the [licenses and authorisation letters](#).

Read the [data on BT trends](#).