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Cattle culled on Cumbrian farm in suspected bovine TB outbreak

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An outbreak of bovine TB is expected to be confirmed in a closed dairy herd near Penrith after lesions were found on cattle there.

Sixty-four animals reacted to skin tests and were slaughtered.

Post mortem results are expected to confirm the disease, according to the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA).

Skin tests were taken at the farm, which has not been publicly identified, on March 7 and numerous reactors were found.

Gonzalo Sanchez, north west veterinary lead for the AHVLA, said contiguous testing on surrounding farms was being carried out and stressed that everything possible was being done to identify the source of infection.

He added: "Bovine TB outbreaks in Cumbria are very rare and there are serious implications for the affected cattle owner. We're pursuing epidemiological investigations to find where it has come from and where it has gone to. We're working really hard to locate the source of infection.

"We're trying to assess how long the farm was infected – there was a previous clear test there 18 months ago.

"It is a very closed herd and there has not been movements of animals off or onto the farm recently. There is no evidence of wildlife infection."

There were three bovine TB outbreaks in Cumbria last year. The county is relatively clear of the disease unlike in the south west of England where it is endemic and having a devastating effect on hundreds of dairy farmers.

It is a chronic disease which can take years to develop and can also infect wildlife. The Government is under pressure from the farming industry to order a cull of badgers in the worst affected areas as it is believed badgers spread the disease.

Most cattle in Cumbria are tested for bovine TB every four years.

Clinical signs include coughing, loss of weight and weakness. But it is difficult to spot without testing.

Mr Sanchez added: "Test results will be available in about three weeks and will tell us which area of the country this has originated from.

"Farmers in the area are well aware of the measures they can take to protect their herds. Bio-security must be kept to a high standard.

"All farmers must ensure they buy animals from three to four year bovine TB testing areas to reduce the risk of bringing the disease in."

A wildlife survey is likely to be conducted in the area around the farm if all other testing does identify a source of infection.

Armathwaite farmer Russell Bowman, chairman of the NFU's north west dairy board, said it was a concern to hear about the outbreak.

"We don't want bovine TB in this part of the world but it's creeping north slowly," he said. "There's nothing that concentrates the mind like an outbreak.

"My first question would be – is it in the wildlife? I know everything is being done to control this outbreak but if it is in the wildlife then it is uncontrollable."

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