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## Bovine TB

**Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the incidence of TB in cattle in (a) England, (b) Herefordshire and (c) Worcestershire was in the last six months for which figures are available. [140460]

**Mr. Bradshaw** [*holding answer 1 December 2003*]: The data requested are not available for Herefordshire and Worcestershire individually. However, the incidence of TB in cattle in (a) England and (b) Hereford and Worcester in each of the last six months is given in the following table.

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### TB herd incidence May—October 2003<sup>(8)</sup>

Percentage

Month	England	Hereford & Worcester
May 2003	3.54	14.97
June 2003	3.98	9.66
July 2003	2.91	10.37
August 2003	2.15	4.12

September 2003	3.12	9.03
October 2003	3.23	8.45
Total	3.22	9.75

(8) Confirmed new herd incidents as a percentage of tests on unrestricted herds. Provisional data downloaded from the State Veterinary Service database on the 27 November 2003—subject to change as outstanding TB test and culture results become available.

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent in support of efforts to identify a candidate vaccine for bovine TB in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and how much has been budgeted for this work over the next three years. [140841]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Research on identifying candidate vaccines for bovine TB was being conducted before 1998 but it is not possible to collate accurate financial figures before this time. The table shows the costs of two projects which identify and test new vaccine candidates for the financial years 1999–2000 to date.

£

Financial Year	Cost
1999–2000	448,134
2000–01	509,954
2001–02	523,408
2002–03	542,024
2003–04	552,357
Total	2,575,877

The current vaccine research programme could not have been undertaken without the sequencing of the *Mycobacterium bovis* genome as all new candidates are discovered through this knowledge. The sequencing of the genome project cost £1,156,293.

In addition, identification of candidates for vaccine and diagnostic purposes is being pursued using "genomic" and "post-genomic" technology, costing £3,318,624 with an end date in 2005–06.

The content and funding for the future TB research is currently under discussion within the Department and is taking account of external scientific advice. TB vaccine development is likely to form an increasingly important part of the research programme.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice the Department has given to farmers on the prevention of TB in cattle, in respect of the height of mineral and feed troughs to avoid badgers gaining access to them. [141086]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Department has provided guidance to farmers on how to reduce the risk of cattle being exposed to *Mycobacterium bovis* in a free booklet entitled "TB in Cattle—Reducing Risk".

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Steps include ensuring mineral blocks and lips of water troughs are raised at least 80 cm (30 inches) off the ground, fencing off badger latrines and setts, not feeding cattle in troughs at pasture and avoiding the use of grass from badger latrines and field margins when cutting silage.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what European Union funds are available to farmers on whose cattle TB restrictions are imposed; how much is payable per head of cattle; whether match funding is required; and what claims the Department has made. [141087]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We are not aware of any EU funds payable to farmers under TB restrictions. The Government currently pays farmers 100 per cent. of market value for cattle removed under TB control measures.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department has analysed the (a) number and (b) proportion of farms where cattle with an autumn TB breakdown (i) have subsequently gone clear and (ii) have an increasing incidence of TB through the winter; and whether the first group of cases occurs in areas with a high level of TB infection in badgers. [141380]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** This information cannot be provided, except at disproportionate cost. There are seasonal trends in the detection of incidents of bovine TB but it is impossible to determine from currently available information whether these trends reflect seasonally in exposure to the disease.

The Randomised Badger Culling Trial, alongside the Road Traffic Accident survey and the TB99 epidemiological questionnaire, is providing data about the prevalence of TB in badgers in areas of high incidence in cattle herds, for analysis by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of TB infection in cattle in the national herd her Department has assessed as being acceptable. [141382]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** A possible long-term objective in terms of control of bovine TB could be to achieve Officially Tuberculosis Free status as defined by the EU and the OIE. In the short term, Defra is seeking to arrest the geographic spread of the disease, and is shortly to

consult on proposals designed to do this. Defra is also soon to consult on a new TB Strategy, looking at the roles of industry and Government, as well as considering what might be achievable in terms of TB control over next 10 years.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of cattle reported to be infected with TB are believed to have acquired infection from cattle-to-cattle transmission; and what proportion are believed to have acquired their infection (a) directly and (b) indirectly from badgers. [141383]

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**Mr. Bradshaw:** It is not possible to ascribe the source of TB infection in cattle, as the routes of transmission of *Mycobacterium bovis* (the causative agent for bovine tuberculosis) from cattle to cattle, and between badgers and cattle, are not fully understood.

The Randomised Badger Culling Trial was designed to provide information on the role of badgers in cattle TB (as well as assessing the effectiveness of two badger culling options as control measures). Other research includes investigation of the pathogenesis of *M. bovis* in cattle. This forms part of a broad programme designed to deliver information on improved diagnostics, how TB is transmitted, how TB develops in affected animals, and on the interaction with wildlife.

In addition, a survey is underway to assess potential risk factors that may predispose herds to TB outbreaks. A preliminary analysis is set out in the Third Report of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the use of polymerase chain reaction testing instead of culture testing for the confirmation of TB in bovine samples. [141385]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Veterinary Laboratories Agency is collaborating with the Imperial College in the design and optimisation of a *Mycobacterium bovis*-specific polymerase chain reaction (or PCR) assay for the detection of *M. bovis* DNA in bovine TB lesions. Any new laboratory test is likely to complement rather than replace existing culture techniques.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason hauliers are prohibited under certain circumstances from collecting full loads of TB reactors, comprising animals from different farms, for delivery to slaughterhouses. [141386]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Any animal movement constitutes a health risk. Under post-FMD movement controls, Defra allowed a round of collections of animals from different farms only if all of the farms involved each had multiple pickup approval.

There are farms which do not want approval or which cannot meet approval requirements. Where farms do not want approval or cannot meet approval requirements, the haulier must transport TB reactor animals direct to the slaughterhouse.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the differences are between TB control programmes in (a) the UK and (b) Ireland. [141387]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The UK broadly adopts the TB control measures set out by EU Directive 64/432/EEC on animal health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine. It is understood that the arrangements in the Republic of Ireland are similar.

The Republic of Ireland has a policy for limited culling of badgers for disease control purposes, whereas the UK does not.

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**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to compensate farmers who suffer consequential losses as a result of TB infection in their herds following the failure of the reactive component of the randomised badger culling trials. [141388]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** We have no plans to compensate farmers who suffer consequential losses as a result of TB infection in their herds following the suspension of badger culling in reactive areas of the randomised badger culling trial. The payment of consequential loss to producers falls within the definition of State Aids and cannot therefore be paid without the agreement of the EU Commission.

There has always been an element of risk in participation in the trial, although the majority of farmers might have presumed that culling badgers would only help reduce the risk of TB in their herds. Nevertheless all farmers took part in the trial on a voluntary basis, having had the choice to opt out totally, agree to survey operations only, or to surveying and culling operations, and to change their level of involvement at any time.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she will prohibit the sale of milk for any purpose from farms under TB restriction. [141390]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Pasteurisation is effective in eliminating the risk from *Mycobacterium bovis* (the causative organism for bovine TB) in milk. Milk from herds under TB restrictions is permitted to be sold for human consumption after it has been heat treated. Milk hygiene legislation requires that raw milk and raw milk products for direct human consumption are produced from milk from officially TB free herds.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what precautions farmers are advised to take to avoid exposing their cattle to *M. bovis* infection. [141391]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Department has provided a significant amount of advice and codes on the health and welfare of livestock. The Defra leaflet, "TB in Cattle—Reducing the Risk" suggests that farmers consider moving to a closed herd system. However, such a system still needs to be combined with other disease prevention measures to reduce risks of disease introduction and spread. Defra has also produced a leaflet "Golden rules for a healthy herd" that gives specific advice on preventative strategies for avoiding introduction of the most important cattle diseases, including TB during restocking.

Defra has also produced a concise list of disease prevention measures, including the need to always know the health status of animals being bought or moved, in the form of a yellow card which was developed with livestock industry representatives and vets. It was sent to all livestock farmers in 2002, and is available on the Defra website.

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**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether *M. bovis* isolates can be characterised to determine its genetic relationship to other isolates by using the technique of DNA fingerprinting; and whether there has been such fingerprinting of TB isolates from cattle and badgers in order to identify epidemiological relationships. [141396]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Spoligotyping is used to determine molecular type for all isolates of the bovine tuberculosis bacillus (*M. bovis*) obtained from badgers and cattle. Variable Number Tandem Repeats (or VNTR), a technique able to subdivide some spoligotypes, is also used. Generally the different strain types of *M. bovis* that these techniques identify exhibit distinct and probably longstanding geographical clustering. Within each geographical cluster the same strains tend to be found in badgers and cattle. Even where the same strain has been found in two different species in the same locality, it is difficult to deduce the direction of interspecies transmission, how often it occurs, and how much transmission there is between animals of the same species.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long the current TB skin test on cattle as a preliminary diagnostic aid has been in use. [141968]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The tuberculin skin test for cattle has been compulsory in Great Britain since 1950. This is the test prescribed by the OIE for international trade, as well as under EU Directive 64/432/EEC on animal health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to replace the TB skin test used on cattle as a preliminary diagnostic aid with a more accurate and sensitive test. [141969]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Improved diagnosis of TB in cattle is a major objective of Defra's wide-ranging research programme. The current most promising candidate is the gamma interferon test, a laboratory-based blood test that measures the immune response to *M. bovis* (the causative agent for bovine TB) of T-cells in cattle blood.

This test was officially recognised by the EU in July 2002, but only for use as a supplement to the Single Intradermal Comparative Cervical Test (SICCT) in TB affected herds. The test is considered more sensitive than the SICCT, but less specific, meaning that it results in a higher probability of false positives. For this reason, the gamma interferon test cannot be used on its own as a screening test for TB for the time being.

In October 2002, Ministers announced the field evaluation of the gamma interferon test, to assess the potential for its use in GB.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in how many cases badger traps laid by or on behalf of the Department in TB culling trials have been interfered with or removed without authorisation. [141971]

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**Mr. Bradshaw:** Interference with badger traps laid in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial is variable between operations. It is usually quite geographically localised and repetitive within a culling operational area. Management records indicate that—over 116 culling operations, across 19 trial areas, between December 1998 and 10 October 2003, during which 15,666 traps were sited—there were 8,981 individual occasions where a trap was interfered with, and 1,827 individual occasions when a trap was removed.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the current status is of research on vaccines suitable for application to (a) badgers and (b) bovine animals to protect against TB infection; and when she expects commercial vaccines will become available. [141976]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Defra's extensive bovine TB vaccine research programme is aimed at identifying the most effective vaccine candidates and the most appropriate vaccination programmes to reduce the incidence of bovine TB. Depending on the outcome of this research, it will be necessary to gain approval for the selected vaccine or vaccines to be used in cattle or badgers or other susceptible species.

The current situation is that the progress on research on vaccines is broadly in line with the timeline set out in the Krebs report, published in 1997. This estimated:

Years 1–5: Identification of candidate vaccines and development of differential diagnostic tests;

Years 5–10: Experimental investigations of vaccination protocols;

Years 10–15: Field trials.

The current status of research on vaccines was studied by the Independent Scientific Group's Vaccine Scoping Study Sub-Committee who submitted their report to Ministers in July. Ministers, last week, recommended publication of the report and this will be available shortly, both in written form and on the Defra website.

It is not possible at this stage to estimate when commercial vaccines will become available, but discussions with industry are ongoing.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations have been made by her Department to insurance providers and underwriters on the funding of a joint venture to top up compensation paid for TB reactor cattle above the proposed cut to average market value. [141999]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** In developing proposals for a fundamental overhaul of our animal disease compensation arrangements, Defra met with representatives of insurance companies earlier in the year to explore a number of different options. It was concluded that "top-up" insurance schemes for loss of high value animals to notifiable animal diseases is not currently a viable option, as the market is not sufficiently developed. Top-up insurance is not set out as a short-term option for compensation for high-value animals in the current consultation on proposals to rationalise compensation for notifiable animal disease control. Under our proposals animals worth significantly more than the average market value can

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be pre-valued and registered with Defra. In such cases the compensation payable will be equivalent to the registered pre-valuation.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to fund average cull-price for TB-infected animals and reactors with an industry levy on (a) milk and (b) beef. [142001]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** The Government are working on proposals for an animal disease levy, which might include TB. The funds raised would be ...the-stationery-office.co.uk/.../31208...

used to pay for, among other things, the costs of compensation for animals which are compulsorily slaughtered. At the moment the option we favour is a levy on live animals rather than animal products, but no decisions have been taken. We intend to consult on our proposals in the first half of next year.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how maintenance of closed dairy herds protects cattle from TB infection. [142003]

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Maintaining a closed herd can eliminate the risk of introducing cattle infected with bovine tuberculosis. The risk of spread of infection from nearby herds and wildlife can be reduced by adopting husbandry and biosecurity measures, as described in the freely available Defra booklet "TB in Cattle—Reducing the Risk".

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