

Scotland declared TB-free

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Scotland's cattle industry has won the approval of Brussels to be declared Officially Tuberculosis-Free (OTF).

A unanimous vote in favour of OTF status at this week's [Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health](#) (SCoFCAH) was welcomed by the [Scottish Government](#) and [NFU Scotland](#), which described it as marking "a new era for animal health and welfare".

The decision to seek the status was based on the fact that the number of confirmed bovine TB cases in Scotland has been at a consistently low level over a sustained number of years. It was also taken in light of the growing threat posed by the year-on-year spread of the disease in parts of England and Wales.

As part of the endorsement new measures will be introduced over several months, including additional TB testing for cattle sourced from England and Wales, a condition which has concerned livestock auctioneers and traders who fear a major reduction in traditional cross-border trade if farmers have to pay for tests before cattle are moved.

However the latest statistics indicate that Scottish farmers are buying fewer cattle from England and Wales, with numbers falling from 21,000 head in 2006 to 14,000 in 2008. There are no testing implications for prime cattle entering Scotland and going straight to abattoirs.

NFU Scotland's vice-president Nigel Miller, described the move as a "fantastic achievement" but conceded there would be concerns over new requirements being placed on suckled calves and store cattle entering Scotland from low risk areas of England and Wales.

"The OTF application process means that those farmers attending current sales of calves south of the Border will be unaffected by any new testing requirements," he said. "As to the future we now have a period of time to look at trade implications of any additional testing requirements. Additional testing may be required but the cost of such testing will always pale against the financial implications of a TB breakdown."

Farmers Weekly Farmer Focus writer Robert Neill said the decision to declare Scotland TB-free would have an "enormous impact" on his 1082-acre arable and beef enterprise at Upper Nisbet in the Scottish Borders.

"The impact will primarily be due to the complications associated with the cross-border movements that currently take place between our farm and my brothers'," he said.

"Every animal wintered in England would have to undergo testing before returning home in the spring. This move would also affect livestock markets relying on cross-border trade between Scotland and England."