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Farmer in cull zone TB-free after agonising struggle

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A farmer in the cull zone says his herd tested TB-free for the first time in 10 years after 92 badgers were removed from his farm during last year's culling campaign.

After struggling with TB for more than a decade, the farmer – who Farmers Weekly has chosen only to name as James to protect his full identity – said his herd tested clear this spring for the first time for many years.

James farms about 700 cattle on farmland in the Gloucestershire cull zone, including 400 dairy cows.

Over the past decade, he has lost on average 50-60 animals each year to bovine TB. The worst TB breakdown resulted in the slaughter of 220 cattle.

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James paid £4,500 to agree to his land being accessible to contractors to remove badgers in last autumn's cull.

The farm covers 200ha and five badger setts are located within 500m of the farm

buildings.

James runs a closed herd, but the replacement youngstock are let out to graze in fields during the summer.

Last year, marksmen removed 92 badgers from the farmland, equivalent to about 10% of the total Gloucestershire cull.

Five of the culled animals displaying visible signs of illness owing to TB, such as TB lesions, were tested privately for the disease – and all five came back positive.

James said his herd tested free of TB at the end of April and a subsequent test, taken 60 days later in July, also tested clear. This has resulted in the removal of TB restrictions, allowing him to trade animals again.

He plans to make the most of this freedom by selling 150 cattle this autumn. “This will free up space and allow us to focus on dairying, which is what we want to do.”

The herd is due to be tested again before Christmas and the outcome will determine whether he can continue trading.

“Over the past 18 months, my animals were fed the same foods in the same place. They have been kept in the same buildings. Everything else was standard,” he said.

“The only thing that has changed is that I was involved in the Gloucestershire pilot, which resulted in 92 badgers being removed from the farm.

“The four-year pilot is designed to test the safety, efficacy and humaneness of culling, but as a spin-off my herd has gone TB-free.

“I’m not saying the badger is the sole culprit. We have got a population of deer going out of control as well. I have also seen two hedgehogs around the farmyard this spring, which I haven’t seen for six years.”

James said he suffered harassment during last year’s culls, including verbal abuse, protesters blowing horns and flashing lights at houses and staff. But overall, their activities did not significantly disrupt the culling or farming operation.

He said the government should be supported for introducing the pilots to at least try to tackle TB in areas where the disease is rife, such as the South West.

“It’s a controversial policy, but what’s the alternative? At the moment, there is no alternative.

“Doing nothing is not an option if we want to beat this disease. If the badger population was healthy, vaccination might work. But it’s no good vaccinating infected animals.”

However, James criticised the government for deciding not to test any of the badgers culled in last year’s pilots for TB.

“They should have been tested and the results should have been shown whether they were infected or not to help the public understand the situation,” he said.

And he said the government and the NFU should have opened up more and better explained to the public why they felt the culls were necessary.

“If the public were more informed, they may be more likely to be on board and more understanding, rather than adopting a bureaucratic approach.”

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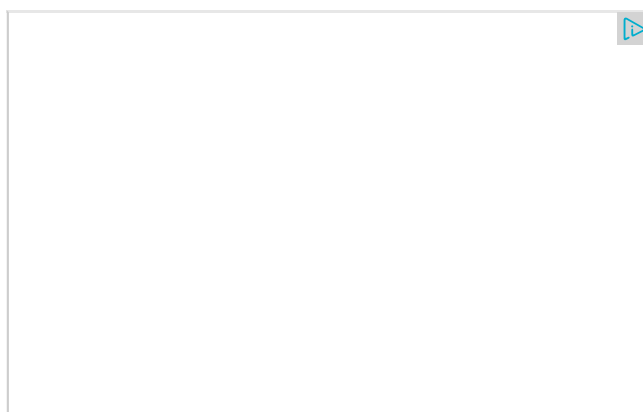
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**Clued-Up** • 3 hours ago

it's extraordinarily difficult to believe the claims made by "James".

"James" claims he had 5 badgers (out of the 92 butchered) tested for TB because they had lesions and all were positive - a 100% strike record, about as credible as dictators being re-elected with 99% majority votes!

DEFRA reports private landowners had 4 badgers tested for TB because they'd been in very poor condition before they were shot and so were much more likely to have TB than healthy-looking badgers. Only one of the four had TB in spite of the obviously biased sample.

The Welsh have given over 3,000 badgers a very detailed health check before vaccinating them and NONE showed any signs of TB. Wales is still a hotspot for bTB (in spite of its success in halving bTB in 4 years). When a landowner alleges he's found 5 badgers out of 92 with visible bTB and trained lay vaccinators haven't found a single badger out of 3,000 with visible bTB in Wales one can reasonably doubt what "James" says.

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**anon e mouse** → Clued-Up • an hour ago

1 in 4 tested had tb ,Cheshire road kill survey shows 25% had tb test more and prove exactly how highly infected the badgers are and vaccination is a delaying tactic !!!!

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