

Ireland to be bovine TB free by 2030 under new Government plans



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The Government has committed to eradicate bovine TB from the national herd by 2030, FarmIreland.ie can reveal.

Under its new plans the country should be free of bovine TB within 12 years and the Government has confirmed that it has decided to establish a stakeholder forum to achieve this goal.

It's also understood that plans are afoot to hold a public consultation on the matter, which is expected to be launched shortly.

Bovine Tuberculosis is a chronic, highly infectious disease of cattle and has come to national attention recently after an outbreak in Kerry. A pilot badger vaccination programme was announced in January this year.

Earlier this year, farmers on the Iveragh Peninsula in Kerry were hit by what they called 'the worst outbreak of TB in living memory' with over 50 farms restricted.

Minister Creed said at the time that the most recent research findings confirm that vaccination of badgers can play a role in reducing the level of infection in cattle, but warned that it is not a 'silver bullet'.

That vaccination programme is targeting areas which have already been part of the field trials demonstrating the effectiveness of badger vaccination and is to be rolled out incrementally to other parts of the country over time, with vaccination gradually replacing the need to remove badgers.

Minister Creed said vaccination of badgers enabled Ireland move forward towards eradication of bovine TB in a controlled holistic way.

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Over €50m is spent trying to eradicate the disease and the rate of incidence of bovine TB in the Irish herd is just over 3pc.

Tuberculosis (TB) in cattle is threat to public health, animal health and trade and all herds must be tested at least once every 12 months.

Bovine TB is caused by *Mycobacterium bovis*, and this organism may also infect badgers. There is widespread infection in the badger population in Ireland. Infected badgers can transmit TB back to cattle.

The current TB eradication programme includes the removal of badgers under licence in certain circumstances, following epidemiological investigations linking infection in cattle to badgers. This intervention strategy is designed to reduce the spread of transmission from badgers to cattle.

The Department of Agriculture has said previously that the ideal long-term answer to the problem of bovine tuberculosis is eradication. It said that with an appropriate co-ordinated approach and new technology currently being developed, Ireland can advance towards eradication of Bovine TB.

Causes of bovine TB infection in cattle

- Breathing air contaminated by already infected animals;
- Consuming contaminated food or water;
- Movement of animals and contact with infected animals e.g. across fences;
- Inter-farm sharing of machinery (cattle trailers, muck/slurry spreaders, etc.) or farm facilities (cattle crushes);
- The use of dirty lorries to transport animals;

- Wildlife, especially badgers, infected with *Mycobacterium Bovis* may be a significant factor in the persistence of bovine tuberculosis in certain areas.

Precautions against TB Infection

- Have stock-proof boundary fencing;
- Avoid contact with other herds and stock of unknown status;
- Exercise care in buying-in cattle. Ensure that only recently tested cattle are allowed onto your farm to mix with your stock;
- Avoid using dirty contract equipment e.g. cattle transport, slurry spreaders. All such equipment should be cleansed and disinfected before use.

The risk of spread from wildlife can be reduced by keeping cattle and infected wildlife apart and by implementing the following measures:

- Fencing off common watercourses, stagnant ponds, badger setts and badger toilet areas;
- Raising drinking and feeding troughs to over 84 cm (32 inches) in height and locating them away from walls/ditches to prevent access;
- Not providing hand feeding to cattle where deer can share it e.g. circular feeders and/or meal troughs;
- Keeping feed storage areas, cattle sheds and yards closed so that wildlife cannot gain entry;
- Checking fields regularly for badger carcasses and especially before moving cattle onto new pasture - note that manual blocks kept in fields may also be accessed by badgers;
- Being aware of unusual sightings of badgers e.g. in daytime. The badgers may be sick from TB - contact your District Veterinary Office.

Wildlife strategy

- In the short term, the contribution of infected badgers to the spread of disease in bovines continues to be quantified and analysed. In this regard, the Department is continuing to operate various badger based research projects,
- In the medium term, badger population control/reduction is focussed on the higher risk-areas of the country where disease is clustered and is subject to detailed epidemiological investigation determining that bovine sources are unlikely,
- In the medium term also, work is progressing on a project, the objective of which is to develop a vaccine for use in badgers that would lead to a reduction in the level of infection in that species, thereby reducing the number of organisms being shed and subsequently the level of transmission to the cattle population.

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