

Vaccination programme on badgers could be biggest ever single advance in wiping out bovine TB

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by:

Francis

Farragher



County Galway IFA Livestock Chairman, Michael Flynn. PHOTO: Hany Marzouk

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OVER 200 badgers have been vaccinated for TB in a stretch of County Galway from the city to the North Clare border as part of a four year pilot programme, also being carried out in three other areas across the country.

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Francis Farragher

A large swathe of south-west

Galway from the city to Athenry onto Loughrea and Gort is included in the vaccination programme that began in early 2014 and that will continue for the next three years.

County Galway IFA Livestock Chairman, Michael Flynn, told the Farming Tribune that the IFA and the farming community warmly welcomed the vaccination initiative on the badgers and added that 'it was the way to go' in terms of tackling the scourge of herds being TB infected through the contact with wildlife.

"It has been proven without any shred of a doubt that infected badgers have been one of the main root causes as to why bovine TB has remained an ongoing problem on many Galway and Irish farms," said Michael Flynn.

He said that work being carried out on the ground by Bernie Forde and his team, under the supervision of Superintending Veterinary Inspector Michael O'Brien and James O'Keeffe, was an invaluable exercise in trying to rid the Irish cattle herd of a scourge that was there for the last 60 years.

"If this vaccination programme works, and if it can then be rolled out onto other badger areas across the country, it could be the biggest single advance ever in our efforts to at last get rid of the TB problem from Irish herds," said Michael Flynn.

The badger is a 'protected' wildlife species but each year in Ireland around 6,000 badgers are being culled in problem TB areas – if the vaccine programme works, then this figure could be reduced to 1,000.

Infected or sick badgers tend to be 'evicted' from their sets so badgers that are actually seen near sheds or fields, will normally tend to be infected with tuberculosis.

In the current vaccination programme, the badgers are trapped in special restraints before being anaesthetised by a vet and then microchipped and vaccinated.

The Dept. are hoping that when the programme ends in 2017 that over 80% of the badger population will have been vaccinated in the designated area of south-west Galway.

Where over three reactors show up in a herd and where it can be established that 'buying in' didn't cause the problem, the Veterinary Office then carry out a wildlife scan of the area before putting a culling programme in place.