

Sunday, April 14, 2013

A catch up

Apologies from blogger HQ - blogging light this week. This posting will be a catch upon some of our recent postings.

First an update on Dianne Summer's progress, after her recent scans and biopsies.

She tells us that unfortunately the scans revealed that she still has active infection in the lung lesion. This after 11 (yes, that is eleven) months of drug therapy, which has just about floored her. And if that wasn't enough, she described the biopsy to remove samples for culture, as 'horrendous'.

Unable to be inserted nasally, the procedure involved inserting a tube through Dianne's mouth into her lung. Her face was covered with a mask to prevent infection to those conducting the tests and her blood pressure went through the roof. This poking and prodding lasted about half an hour.

We wish that Defra would take the control of so called 'bovine' tuberculosis as seriously.

Dianne's consultants are divided as to the next step in her treatment. One suggests removal of the affected upper lung lobe, while another wants to continue the drug therapy for a few more months.

She is not out of the woods yet.

So, a timely wake up call for all those pushing for abandoning all TB control in cattle, on the grounds of pasteurisation, abattoir surveillance and cost. That attitude is just plain reckless, when 'bovine' TB is infecting companion animals, pets and many other mammals.

Those 35,000 sentinel 'messengers' which Defra shot last year, were telling us something. We ignore their message at our peril. This level of environmental 'bovine' tuberculosis is causing a dangerous spill over into many other mammals, and passing the cost of Dianne Summer's illness - identified as the same spoligotype as her dead alpacas, none of which had had contact with cattle - to a cash strapped NHS is not very smart.

Last month we reported outbreaks of tuberculosis occurring this year in 'TB free' Germany and Switzerland. Here it may be prudent to point out that 'TB free' does not mean zero cases. The term refers to the OIE's (Office of International Epizootics) definition of what is officially tuberculosis free, from which Owen Paterson's Parliamentary Questions extracted the following answer:

20th November 2003: *column 1205W [140308]*

The Office of International Epizootics (OIE) provides expertise for the control of animal diseases. Article 2.3.3.2 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health code states that for a country or zone to qualify officially as officially free from bovine tuberculosis, it shall satisfy the following requirements:

* bovine tuberculosis is notifiable in the country.

* 99.8 per cent of the herds in the considered geographical area have been officially free from bovine tuberculosis for at least the past three years as disclosed by periodic testing of all cattle in the area to determine the absence of bovine tuberculosis.

(Periodic testing of all cattle is not required in an area where a surveillance programme reveals that 99.9 per cent of the cattle have been in herds officially free from tuberculosis for at least six years).

We have already pointed out that in this area of the EU, sales of milk are banned from affected farms until they test clear; although if such farms can find dedicated transport and a manufacturing route, then the product may be turned into powder. But we understand that sales of meat are also banned.

The cost of all this is shared between government, farmer and private insurance with compensation paid for cattle taken. This money comes from the compulsory insurance + Government contribution but for production losses private insurance is needed. (In the hot spot areas of GB, no such insurance is available. Where it may still be offered, premiums have more than doubled and pay outs halved.)

Diagnosis of TB in Germany and Switzerland, is primarily the intradermal skin test, followed by PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) screens on inconclusive reactors.

Meanwhile, as Dianne Summers attempts to get her life back (her lung appears to be past repair), cattle farmers struggle with restrictions piled on restrictions piled on restrictions and the word 'Tuberculosis' fades from view - if it was ever there in the first place - the Twits and Tweeters are planning a March.

Nice poster. Shame about the message.

This disease is not about cattle, or badgers.
Already we are seeing spillover to and consequential human infections from companion mammals and domestic pets.

An eradication programme should seek to control and eradicate a killer zoonosis -Tuberculosis. Not any single species.

We forget that at our peril.

