

TB levy could top £60/head

Farmers Weekly staff
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A DEFRA-FUNDED report has calculated that producer levy costs for bovine tuberculosis compensation could be as high as £63.80 a head if introduced.

The report, written by researchers at Reading University, said the current compensation system needed revising.

This was as a survey of 151 farms showed 20% of dairy farms and 35% of beef farms had a net gain associated with their breakdown.

If only farmers in hotspot areas paid a levy the cost would be 0.5ppl or £39.36 a head in England and 0.55ppl and £63.80 a head in Wales, said the report.

But the cost would be substantially reduced if the levies were applied to all farmers in England and Wales – to 0.00187ppl and £7.21 a head.

The report did acknowledge that at these rates the levies on beef finishers would in some cases outweigh the gross margins for those finishing cattle.

"Any increase in farm costs would inevitably result in farmers being less competitive, especially beef producers," it added.

Robert Forster, chief executive of the National Beef Association said the figures were "b*****s" and no beef farmer could afford them.

Jan Rowe, vice-chairman of the NFU's animal health committee, added: "Until DEFRA deals with the TB issue properly...the industry will not entertain the notion of a levy."

A DEFRA spokesman said: "The government is still considering the notion of a possible imposition of a levy in controlling exotic diseases, and including endemic diseases such as tuberculosis is also a possibility.

"Imposing such a levy on a regional basis is not part of our current plans, but cannot be ruled out.

"We shall consult on all these issues in due course. An animal disease levy would require legislation and so could not be introduced quickly."