

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BOVINE TB

2 September 2014

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss)

I am today launching a new Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme (BEVS) as part of the Government's comprehensive strategy to make England bovine TB-free. Between 1997 and 2010 TB in cattle increased ninefold, threatening the future of our beef and dairy industries and our nation's food security. That is why this Government is pursuing a comprehensive strategic approach, based on best international practice and supported by leading vets, to ensure that England is TB free by 2038.

The BEVS will support badger vaccination projects in areas next to the bovine TB high risk area. The edge area covers counties in the middle of the country such as Cheshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire. These areas are most at risk from the disease spreading from the South West and West Midlands. Vaccinating healthy badgers in this way is intended to help create a buffer zone to help prevent the spread of bovine TB to new areas of the country where the incidence of bTB is currently low.

The package of support includes a funding award of up to 50 per cent of long-term costs for vaccinating, vaccination advice from field experts, free loans of equipment such as traps, and free vaccine supply. Eligible vaccination projects need to be predominantly in the edge area, and will be required to cover a minimum area of approximately 15km². More details, including eligibility criteria, information for applicants and a toolkit to help in establishing new vaccination campaigns, are available on GOV.UK. I will be placing copies in the Libraries of the House.

I hope that wildlife and farming groups, many of whom have been closely involved in the development of this initiative, will seize this opportunity. I want to use annual badger vaccination, over wider areas than is currently carried out, to show that vaccination has a role to play in combatting this disease.

This vaccination scheme is just one element of our strategy to eradicate bovine TB. This includes strict cattle movement controls and also culling in the high risk area, which overseas experience shows is vital to beating the disease.

As part of our programme, we continue to take tough but necessary steps tightening and extending cattle controls. Since 30 June, cattle herds which graze our commons have been subject to additional pre-movement testing requirements. From 1 October, we will be limiting further the number and type of movements that can happen without a pre-movement test and bringing an end to the practice of part of a herd coming out of TB restrictions before the rest of the herd has tested free of the disease. We are also encouraging the use of risk-based trading.

Culling continues to have a vital role to play in the high risk area and this year will see the second year of culling in Somerset and Gloucestershire. Tackling the disease in both cattle and wildlife has worked in Australia which is now TB free and Ireland and New Zealand, where incidence has been reduced. Leading vets support this approach.

It is vital that we work to make Britain disease free – doing nothing is not an option. The measures we have in place together amount to a comprehensive strategy which includes controls on cattle movements and security, vaccination in the edge area and culling in those areas where the disease is rife.