

Half a million cattle are overdue for their TB test, Badger Trust reveals

Strictly embargoed: 16.30 Wednesday 5 November 2008.

Almost 500,000 cattle are overdue for their bovine TB test at any one time, the Badger Trust has revealed today, despite claims by farming unions that "farmers are doing everything they can to control bovine TB".

The problem is worst in the West of England and in Wales. In **West** England, approximately 232,000 are overdue for their test at any one time. In Wales, around 152,000 cattle are overdue. These high levels of untested cattle also correspond to the worst rates of bovine TB.

A policy of "zero tolerance" for overdue TB testing was supposedly introduced in November 2004, when 3,855 herds were overdue for their test. By August 2005 the number of overdue herds had fallen to 1,593. But using the Freedom of Information Act, the Badger Trust has established that the failure to comply with the testing regime has been getting worse year on year, with 4,094 herds overdue by May 2008. The Badger Trust estimates that around 7% of all herds due for testing in the course of the year are overdue at any one time. Most alarming of all, in May 2008 a total of 606 herds were more than 12 months overdue for their test, with another 1,071 more than three months overdue. If these figures are applied to average herd sizes in countries and regions, this means that around 34,300 cattle are more than a year overdue for their test at any one time in the West of England. In Wales, the figure is around 20,000 cattle.

The information has been provided to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, which is today quizzing Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, on his bovine TB policy[1].

Trevor Lawson from the Badger Trust commented: "It is a national disgrace that hundreds of thousands of potentially infected cattle are evading their TB test every month, with tens of thousands more than a year overdue. The Government is doing nothing to stop it and the zero tolerance policy is simply empty rhetoric. If bovine TB is to be brought under control, zero tolerance must mean zero tolerance, with substantial penalties for farmers who fail to comply."

ENDS

For further information, contact Trevor Lawson on 07976 262388. Trevor will be available for interview in London from 16.00 today (5 November). For comment in Wales, please contact Steve Clark from Badger Trust Cymru, on 07867 673054.

Notes to editors:

1. 4.30pm, Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Venue: Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, London.
Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.
PO Box 708, EAST GRINSTEAD, RH19 2WN
Tel: 08458 287878 Fax: 02380 233896
E-mail press@badgertrust.org.uk
www.badgertrust.org.uk
Registered charity no.1111440
Company registered in the UK No.5460677