



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Wales TB Eradication Programme

Published 2017



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Welsh Government mission statement

“A TB free Wales for a healthy, profitable and sustainable farming industry”

The 2012 framework for bovine TB eradication was an important milestone in Wales’ eradication journey. It is now time to take stock, reflect on our successes, learn lessons and introduce a fresh approach that will take us closer to our goal of a TB Free Wales.

The progress made to date has been promising with the number of new TB incidents at a 12 year low and over 95% of herds TB free.

We want to build on this success and speed up progress by improving the evidence base and enhancing measures further. Our focus must always be the long term objective of TB eradication.

Our approach to disease eradication must continue to concentrate on all sources of TB infection, including cattle-to-cattle, wildlife and other non-bovine animals.

The Programme will contain comprehensive and coherent measures set out in a delivery plan that is adaptable and flexible to changes in the bovine TB picture in Wales.

Annual herd testing continues to identify infection early and provides valuable evidence to demonstrate differences in the disease picture across Wales. Consequently, annual herd testing will remain for as long as is necessary.



We know that disease levels are not uniform across the country and that disease drivers vary.

This Programme will introduce a regional approach to TB eradication. We will define different categories of area, reflecting the measurements necessary to address the varying disease pictures.

Herds which have been under TB restrictions for a long period of time will benefit from enhanced measures. All of these breakdown herds will have individual, bespoke action plans, developed with the farmer and their private vet. These action plans will include measures required to drive down infection and remove disease as quickly as possible.

We will also usher in a new drive to increase the information base and understanding of the farming industry of the issues and risks of buying and selling cattle. Risk based trading schemes have made a significant contribution to TB eradication in other countries. Our Programme will continue to learn lessons from others and replicate the most useful schemes.

Every farm, without exception, whether it has suffered a TB breakdown or not, should always follow good biosecurity and husbandry practices. Biosecurity is key in protecting animals from bovine TB and other serious animal diseases and farmers should be able to assess their risk. Working with farmers and our partners and building on our earlier work in this area, a single, standardised biosecurity scoring tool will be developed, which can be used by every farmer to assess levels of biosecurity on their farms.

Underpinning this will be our stakeholders and partners and their ongoing commitment and co-operation, this is key to delivering a successful outcome and eventually our goal of a TB free Wales.

We will seek to make policies mandatory, that help the industry protect itself from TB, and will work wherever possible with other UK administrations to ensure that we achieve a joined up approach, as the disease knows no boundaries.

Our vision

Our broad vision is to enhance the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of people and communities in Wales and to achieve a better quality of life for our own and future generations. The TB Eradication Programme contributes to this vision by seeking to minimise TB, and the associated animal welfare, social, economic and environmental impacts, safeguarding public health and, eradicating the disease thus contributing to the profitability of the livestock industry.

This Programme supports our long-term commitment to eradicate TB and applies the sustainable development principle that prevention is better than cure. Through eradicating TB we contribute to the following well-being goals:

- **A prosperous Wales** – TB continues to cause significant socio-economic costs to farmers, the wider farming industry, the rural community and taxpayers.
- **A resilient Wales** – Eliminating TB would result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and maintain a sustainable livestock sector.
- **A healthier Wales** – TB is a zoonotic disease which can affect all mammals including humans. As well as the animal health benefits, eradicating TB protects humans from TB.
- **A globally responsible Wales** – Taking an aggressive approach to the eradication of TB and the controls we implement will reassure potential trading partners.

The TB Eradication Programme applies the Sustainable Development Principle and Five Ways of Working through:

- taking a long-term approach of eradicating TB which will contribute to a more prosperous and sustainable livestock sector for future generations
- tackling TB in the most effective way through continuous review and the collection and analysis of evidence with the principle that prevention is better than cure being fundamental
- integrating the well-being goals within the objectives of the Eradication Programme and aligning it with the priorities of the Government Programme
- working closely with Defra in a collaborative way to find shared sustainable solutions as well as liaising with other countries in relation to their approach to the eradication of TB
- involving the livestock industry in the decisions that affect them through partnership working at national and local level.



Foundation of our Plan

Our goal is to eradicate bovine TB from Wales. Since 2008, we have had in place an eradication Programme that is aimed at tackling all sources of infection including cattle, non-bovines such as llamas and alpacas and wildlife including badgers and deer. The various elements of the Programme have been introduced progressively and have provided a comprehensive and integrated approach covering all aspects of disease prevention, transmission and breakdown management. Over the last few years there has been some progress towards achieving this with a downward trend in new TB incidents.

The main components of the Programme are aimed at limiting and mitigating against the spread of infection by cattle. This includes surveillance and control measures which are

designed to identify infected cattle as early as possible and minimise the risk of the disease spreading. Up to 2008, the testing frequency of herds ranged between annual testing and four-yearly testing and was determined by the proportion of herds in each parish which had previously been infected. During TB Health Check Wales, which was carried out between October 2008 and December 2009, all cattle herds in Wales were tested to give us a better understanding of the disease situation across the country. We found the disease was present in areas where herds were previously tested only once every four years. As a result of the findings of TB Health Check Wales the annual herd TB testing regime was introduced to maintain a high level of surveillance.



Developing and promoting improved biosecurity and husbandry practices will continue to be a key part of the Programme reducing the risk of infection from cattle and wildlife. We have sought to improve biosecurity by giving farmers access to advice so that they can manage and reduce the risks and also by providing information about potential risks through initiatives such as Informed Purchasing and the location of TB affected farms.

With over seven years of annually testing cattle under our belt we have built up an extensive dataset showing the picture of disease across the country. We know TB incidence and prevalence are not uniformly distributed throughout Wales and our team of veterinary advisors has identified different patterns of disease across the country. This work provides us with a better understanding of the key risk factors involved, enabling the development of more targeted approaches to tackling disease in different regions.

Detailed national and regional statistics on TB are available in the Annual Surveillance Reports. The quarterly Wales TB Dashboard presents a suite of key measures showing the disease situation across Wales and demonstrating the progress our TB Eradication Programme has made.

More widely, success in tackling bovine TB will contribute to the long term vision for animal health and welfare in Wales through five strategic outcomes. These are split between those where animal health and welfare policy intervention will have the most influence and greatest impact and those where such interventions will have a lesser impact but still make an important contribution to their achievement:

Direct Impact

- Wales has healthy and productive animals
- Animals in Wales have a good quality of life
- People trust and have confidence in the way food is produced and the way public health is protected

Indirect Impact

- Wales has a thriving rural economy
- Wales has a high quality environment

The eradication of TB from Wales will depend on the collective efforts of government and industry. The ongoing commitment and co-operation of stakeholders will be vital in order to build on the foundations laid down since the Programme was introduced in 2008.

Core Values

The Wales TB Eradication Programme has at its heart, the four key principles of infectious disease control:

- **Keep it out** – preventing disease from entering the herd;
- **Find it fast** – finding infected cattle at the earliest opportunity, through testing, before they have chance to infect others;
- **Stop it spreading** – promptly removing infected cattle and preventing the disease from spreading to other animals;
- **Stamp it out** – eliminating disease once infection has been found.

Infections in animals can spread through any of the following:

- movement of animals, people and machinery between or within farms
- contact with neighbours' livestock
- contamination by wildlife and birds
- animals drinking from contaminated rivers and streams

To address these, we will use the different categories of area across Wales to determine disease status and requirements and ensure they are complemented by wider national controls. This more targeted approach allows us to tailor disease control and prevention measures in each of the areas.

The Programme will also make best use of, and learn lessons from, all the available evidence, technologies, and the latest scientific research from across the world.

The Regionalisation of Wales

The splitting of Wales into a number of “TB areas” reflects the need to recognise the differing disease situations. The relevance and emphasis of each of the four key principles of infectious disease control will vary depending on the locally identified priorities in each TB area.

Epidemiology underpins our growing understanding of the local drivers. This has led to the establishment of TB areas that reflect the prevailing local circumstances and the development of measures that are best suited to make a difference to disease in those areas.

A Programme led by the latest science and learning

We regularly meet and work with scientists, interested organisations and other administrations who have been attempting to control and eradicate TB.

In particular there has been a great deal of contact and discussion with the Eradication Programmes that have been operating in New Zealand and Australia, and where appropriate lessons have been drawn from their experience. More locally the Programmes being pursued in other UK administrations, particularly England and Northern Ireland have been closely observed.



Our policies and aims

Biosecurity

Farm biosecurity is a set of measures designed to protect a herd from the entry and spread of pests and diseases. Farm biosecurity is the responsibility of the farmer, and that of every person visiting or working on the farm. These measures can be applied (in most cases) easily and at low cost. The benefits of good biosecurity include:

- helping to keep disease out
- reducing the potential spread of disease
- helping to keep animals healthy
- cutting costs of disease prevention and treatment
- improving farm efficiency.

Our Programme aims to develop and promote improved biosecurity by communicating the benefits to the industry ensuring that farmers always have access to the right advice and guidance to allow them to make sensible decisions.

Application of Epidemiology

Our dedicated TB Epidemiology team will continue to identify trends in disease and develop measures tailored to meet the epidemiological conditions of differing regions in Wales. This team will be key to assessing the success of measures in each of the TB Areas and also the location of the borders of the TB Areas according to disease incidence and prevalence.

Regionalisation

The Programme will adopt a targeted approach to tackling disease in different areas by applying controls based on the disease situation and risk. This will complement our national controls and herd- interventions.

The TB areas in Wales will be established on the basis of epidemiological evidence and risks in each area. Being declared a TB-free area is a realistic short-term objective for parts of Wales, while other areas require greater intervention

to drive down the disease further. These areas will be open to change and we will gain a better understanding of the varying levels of disease across the country and the key risk factors as the Programme develops.

Informed Purchasing

Farmers should always consider risk when purchasing cattle. Risk Based Trading Schemes have made a significant contribution to TB eradication in other countries. To help farmers make informed decisions about the health of the cattle they wish to buy, we will introduce a mandatory Risk Based Trading Scheme to ensure that farmers display TB information at the point of sale. To support this policy we will also encourage and promote accredited cattle TB health schemes and remove the stigma associated with TB, encouraging farms to be open about their TB statuses.

Cymorth TB

Cymorth TB is a voluntary Programme that provides practical, wrap around, support to farmers and herd keepers affected by TB. It does this in the first instance by providing bespoke, specialist veterinary interventions at different stages during a breakdown. The Programme also offers individual farmers and their families suffering a TB breakdown personal wellbeing and crisis support, on a self referral basis. Finally, the Programme offers business continuity, mentoring and advice and guidance from specialist business advisors.

Chronic herd breakdowns

We will aim to stamp disease out from infected herds at the earliest opportunity. Whilst the measures applied to a breakdown are effective in the majority of cases, when breakdowns fail to resolve, a different approach is needed. A small proportion of TB breakdowns in Wales are characterised as long term. These herds are very costly to the Government and industry on an ongoing basis and they also pose an

unacceptable disease risk to other herds and businesses around them. The Programme will aim to minimise the time these holdings are under restriction by clearing up infection promptly and efficiently.

The Programme will target unresolved breakdowns and will include the development of bespoke action plans to tackle TB in these herds. Interventions within each plan will be aimed specifically at the risk factors unique to that breakdown and will all need to be applied together. Enhanced measures will be used to eliminate infection and reduce the risk of wider disease spread, restore holdings to TB-free status, reduce the costs and implications to the taxpayer, herd owners and neighbouring herds.

Surveillance

Cattle keepers are required by law to have their cattle tested for TB. All herds are tested at least once a year, (with the exception of calves under 42 days). Cattle are tested to make sure that they are free from TB and to allow Officially Tuberculosis Free (OTF) herds to trade cattle. Cattle are also tested to identify those herds which are infected.

There are two different official cattle tests which are approved for use in Wales:

- the tuberculin skin test
- the gamma interferon blood test.

These tests detect an immune response to bovine TB and can identify infection before cattle show any signs of illness. Removing infected cattle as early as possible reduces the chance of them infecting others. No diagnostic test is perfect and neither test is 100%. It is for this reason that infected herds have to have at least two clear tests before movement restrictions are lifted. This reduces the risk of infected animals remaining undetected within a herd.

Tuberculin skin test

The skin test is the only test recognised for demonstrating the officially TB-free status of cattle and cattle herds and so it is used as the main screening test. The test is highly specific and produces very few false positive results. After identifying infection in a herd a stricter interpretation of the next test result is used. This increases the test's sensitivity ability to identify any remaining infected cattle. The skin test has been used worldwide in successful TB eradication Programmes.

Gamma interferon blood test

The gamma interferon test is used to complement the skin test and can detect infection earlier. When used alongside the skin test it improves the likelihood that infected cattle will be identified. It is one of the most important tools we have to help eliminate disease from an infected herd.

The gamma interferon test requires a blood sample. It is not as good as the skin test at correctly identifying uninfected cattle (its has a lower specificity). This means that, if it was used instead of the skin test, there is a small risk that some herds would be incorrectly identified as being infected. Because of this we do not use the gamma test as the main screening test. We use it in infected herds in specific circumstances.

- in less infected areas of Wales, to help stop TB from becoming established
- in areas where TB is more common, to help clear infection from herds more quickly.

Post mortem examination and culture

Post-mortem inspections are performed on all cattle carcasses to check if meat is safe to eat. Microbiological culture is a laboratory test used to identify the presence of *Mycobacterium bovis* (bovine TB). It can also identify the exact type of bovine TB. But since post-mortem examination and culture tests can fail to identify if infection is present, the skin and/or gamma test results are used to determine if a herd or animal is infected.

Pre-Movement Test

Pre-movement testing helps us identify infected cattle before they are moved and reduces the risk of disease spread. Depending on the category of area in Wales, some herds will require a pre-movement test before animals are transported to markets and/or other parts of the country.

Post-movement Test

Post-movement testing may detect additionally infected animals that are not picked up by an earlier pre-movement test, particularly where an animal has become infected after the test was carried out or it was too early for the test to identify it as infected. It will identify disease in some animals at an earlier stage i.e. before it would be picked up at the next routine herd test, which may not be due for up to another 12 months. This will reduce the likelihood of TB spreading to other non-infected cattle in the herd and prevent the disease from becoming established.

Inconclusive Reactors

An Inconclusive Reactor (IR) is an animal which has given readings to the tuberculin skin test between the clear (pass) and reactor (fail) ranges. Because there is some uncertainty as to the disease status of an IR it/they must be re-tested.



Farmers are required to immediately isolate IR(s) from the rest of the herd to reduce the risk of TB spreading to other cattle within the herd and to other herds.

IRs are tested again after 60 days, either on their own or, in a herd where reactors were also found, with the rest of the herd. Retests can be made at standard and severe interpretation, as well as via gamma interferon testing.

This Programme will aim to remove IRs found in long term breakdown herds in specific circumstances, alongside any reactors, to reduce disease spread further.

TB in Non-bovines

The TB Eradication Programme is aimed at tackling all sources of infection including cattle and wildlife but also non-bovine animals such as camelids, goats and deer, all of which are susceptible to *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*). They are generally considered to be “spill-over hosts” meaning that they are unlikely to sustain the infection within their own population in the absence of infected cattle or other wildlife. Only a relatively small number of such animals are identified as infected each year. We will, therefore, maintain our passive approach to surveillance of these animals but will keep this under review as well as the legislation to enable us to deal effectively and quickly with incidents of TB in specified non-bovine animals.

TB in Wildlife

TB can infect all mammals and although most wild species present a relatively low risk, some are regarded by veterinary experts as “reservoirs”, which can lead to a persistence of disease. When deemed necessary we will monitor the level of TB in wildlife in order to ensure that a reasonable and logical solution can be found to eradicate the disease and maintain and protect our wild species from further infection.

Statistics and targeting

Our long-term aim is to eradicate bovine TB in Wales. To make this achievable in as short a time as possible, it is important that we are able to gauge progress objectively. We will set ambitious

targets by which progress will be measured and these targets will be set out in our delivery plan. We will focus on achieving a reduction in TB incidence, herd prevalence, the rate of recurrence and a reduction in the number of long term breakdowns. It is essential to chart progress towards our goal of a TB-Free Wales. The TB Dashboard, presents data visually, presents a suite of key measures, and will be used to chart the journey to TB eradication on a quarterly basis.

Enforcement

It is clear that TB eradication will take a lot longer and cost all parties a lot more if the rules, information, advice and guidance provided are evaded, ignored or misunderstood by farmers and others with a role in making disease eradication a reality. We are aware that a small minority have in the past contravened the rules jeopardising their own businesses and undermined the efforts of the vast majority. For this reason we will continue to bear down on non-compliance with the rules and regulations that underpin the Programme. We will also continue to work with Local Authorities and other partners to introduce further targeted measures to combat non-compliance where these are deemed to be appropriate and necessary.

Compensation

We will continue to pay compensation for cattle slaughtered because of TB. We will keep TB compensation under review with a view to improving how it is paid to encourage herd owners to follow best practice.

It is important both for disease control purposes and financial reasons to prevent overvaluation as it increases the cost to the taxpayer and can offer little incentive for some farmers to prevent TB. We will ensure that, as far as possible, the system in place meets the following objectives:

- a valuation system which is sustainable, promotes good practice and contributes to the eradication of TB.
- a system which penalises cattle keepers who have not complied with the rules.
- compensation which is as far as possible fair to the taxpayer and cattle keepers whilst meeting the Welsh Government’s legal obligations.

We will consider approaches used in other countries and for other diseases which may better meet the objectives. This will include exploring other ways in which compensation can be linked to implementation of good biosecurity and husbandry practices. We will also ensure that any compensation system is able to adapt quickly and sustainably to any significant change in Government funding models or wider funding challenges.

Procuring Services

We will continue to procure and manage contracts that support the TB Eradication Programme. We follow strict procurement rules which enable the delivery of the services required at the best value for tax payers.

We will continue to contract with Veterinary Delivery Partners and other veterinary suppliers for services of a veterinary nature which include government funded TB tests and Cymorth TB visits.

Other contracts provide services associated with the removal of animals for TB purposes such as the valuation of bovine animals; on farm slaughter or the removal of animals for abattoir slaughter.

Governance

The TB Eradication Programme will continue to be overseen by a Programme board made up of a small number of experts closely associated with the farming industry. This allows the group to retain a clear focus and to make decisions swiftly.

As part of implementation of the Eradication Programme we will continue to draw on advice and guidance from a range of stakeholder groups representing the full breadth of opinion. Work is ongoing to identify appropriate channels through which this can be maintained, be it via existing structures or by putting in place new, and enhanced arrangements.

Into the future

We have made significant progress over the last nine years, as we press on towards our goal of a TB free Wales. It is vitally important we tackle this disease to safeguard the future of the industry and to protect public and animal health. Having laid the foundation, developed our values and strengthened our policies we're now in a transitional phase that will see us move closer to our overall objective of a TB Free Wales.

From this year the Programme will be implemented by means of a Delivery Plan which sits under this overarching document. The Delivery Plan will contain detailed measures and enhancements to be adopted on an all-Wales basis and those to be taken forward in each of the TB Areas.

Implementing the Programme by means of a Delivery Plan allows for greater flexibility and enables the Programme to adapt to the changing situation on the ground. This agile way of working allows us to be reactive to new and emerging information about the disease picture and enables the swift inclusion of enhancements to reflect the latest science and learning.

The success of this Programme will depend on the participation and co-operation of the farming industry, veterinary profession and delivery partners. Only then can we safeguard and ensure that Wales has a healthy, profitable and sustainable farming industry.



