

# Recommendations to improve communications and engagement with the farming community around TB control and eradication in Wales

**By the Welsh TB Engagement Task & Finish Group**

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# Executive Summary

Improving communications around TB and engagement of the farming community means building trust. Trust between Welsh Government, farming industry and the veterinary profession. Building trust involves ongoing dialogue, with the sharing of experience and the exchange of information and knowledge. This report outlines how Government can achieve this and therefore improve engagement, but it comes with a stark warning.

*“There is a risk of going around in circles...”*

*“I want Welsh Gov to listen. Take on board what we say and recommend...  
Empowerment comes with listening.”*

From members of the T&FG

To empower means to give people the authority or power to do something, as well as increasing confidence to make decisions and control factors in one’s life (taken from the Oxford Dictionary). The Task & Finish Group have made it clear that for the farming community to be empowered, so for vets and farmers to have the power to tackle TB and have the confidence to make decisions on cattle purchasing, cattle culling, farm biosecurity management, TB testing regimes and disease prevention measures, they need better access and utilisation of data. To know what is driving infection on an individual farm requires a range of data and this only becomes useful information and knowledge when it is shared and discussed. This critically includes much closer collaboration between farmers, their private vets, Official Veterinarians and the Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA) so that they can work together in an ongoing exchange of information.

The farming industry have made huge efforts and sacrifices to combat the devastating disease of TB. This is evident through compliance with repeated and increasing cattle testing, movement restrictions, loss of income, farm management changes, as well as engagement in industry initiatives and studies to progress their understanding alongside the day job of farming. The vast majority of farms have been and continue to be compliant with statutory testing requirements, despite the industry facing an increasingly uncertain and challenging future. So why is there a perceived lack of trust in industry to make responsible farm management decisions? This report describes the ways to improve communications with industry around TB as well as ways to increase engagement of farmers and vets in TB control and eradication in Wales. It highlights how Government can empower industry immediately and it’s largely to do with accessibility of data, appreciation and understanding of the right information to make better on farm decisions, which can then be supported with improved interaction between key farmer and veterinary stakeholders.

The Task & Finish Group consisted of 21 members to include cattle farmers from across Wales, private vets and delivery partners, the Animal Plant and Health Agency, industry organisations and researchers working on TB in Wales. As a result of many interviews, conversations and three facilitated workshops between March and April 2022, a number of recommendations have been co-produced covering a wide remit by a diverse and experienced group of industry stakeholders.

The recommendations are not only testimony to the passion, resilience and experience of the Task & Finish Group (T&FG) members but give the industry and Government reason to be optimistic. There are lots of

steps that can be taken in just the short term to improve the relationship between Government and the farming industry, which in turn will help tackle TB.

The top five most pressing recommendations the T&FG want to see action on are:

1. Greater **availability and accessibility of TB testing data** for farmers and private vets. This will contribute to more informed and ultimately more responsible decisions around cattle movements, herd management and farm biosecurity, which will all have a significant impact on controlling TB, especially if higher risk animals can be identified and restricted.
2. Enable **farmers, private vets and official veterinarians to work more closely in partnership with APHA vets**. Welsh Government wants to empower farmers and vets to make prompt and informed decisions and prevent TB breakdowns; one way to do that is through sharing TB testing data. An independent 'One Stop Shop' for data, information, guidance and support will contribute to this and will help mitigate and reduce the occurrence of misinformation and misconceptions across the industry.
3. Changes to the **format, language and tone of letters and notices** that land on farmers' doorsteps, which will demonstrate Government's commitment to improving the relationship between farmers and authority.
4. **Reviews of the Terms of Reference of existing TB boards**, as well as reviews of existing initiatives and programmes (e.g., Cymorth TB) will help improve engagement and uptake of existing/new initiatives. Build on success and start pilot projects as a specific outcome from existing boards/groups/schemes.
5. Urgent **action on Risk Based Trading** – or Informed Purchasing – with cross border collaboration on a **central, open-source database** to include crucial TB testing histories and with mechanisms that enable the disclosure of relevant information at marts/auctions to make informed cattle purchasing a reality.

Many of the issues discussed by the Task & Finish Group also occur in other nations and have also been discussed in England but in separate and unlinked groups. Considering trade and disease know no boundaries, this disconnect needs to change. Many of the recommendations will need involvement and representation from all devolved nations, with the potential for formal roles connecting similar initiatives across borders. It was also apparent how beneficial training and advice in scientific & policy communications would be for Government stakeholders, as well as for vets in APHA and staff in veterinary practice. Improving the transfer of technical, scientific and policy information to different audiences underpins all communications.

Nevertheless, and above all else, the need for action following these recommendations was keenly felt. To truly engage the industry on TB eradication and build the trust and respect of farmers and vets facing the harsh realities of TB testing and its fallout, real change as a result of this Task & Finish Group needs to be seen urgently. If not, the opportunity provided by the establishment of this group in order to build bridges and foster a sense of Team Wales in the fight against TB, will be severely hampered. This Task & Finish

Group and their recommendations mark the start of a renewed journey towards TB eradication, spearheaded by an industry-led group that believes change is possible. It is now for Government to act and play a role in enabling these recommendations to happen.

*Participants in T&FG*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Area of specialism / location</b>
Roger Lewis	Dairy farmer / South Wales
Evan Roberts	Dairy farmer / North Wales
Paul Williams	Beef farmer / North Wales
Sharon Hammond	Beef farmer /Mid Wales
Ifan Lloyd	Iechyd Da / South Wales
Brendan Griffin	Private vet / South Wales
Dewi Hughes	Menter a Busnes / North Wales
-	Private vet / Borders
Alan Huxtable	Government vet / Wales
Michal Siwonia	Government vet / Wales
Amy Smith	Government vet / Wales
Dylan Morgan	Union / Wales
Tori Morgan	Union / Wales
Hazel Wright	Union / Wales
Elin Jenkins	Union / Wales
Kirsten Hughes	Levy body / Wales
Chris Dodds	Auctioneer / Wales & England
Glyn Hewinson	Researcher / Wales
Richard Pizzey	Researcher/ Wales
Gareth Enticott	Researcher / Wales & England

# Glossary

APHA – Animal Plant and Health Agency

BCMS – British Cattle Movement Service

CoC – Code of Conduct

DEFRA – Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DRF – Disease Report Forms

EID – Electronic Identification FUW

– Farmers Union of Wales

[ibTB](#) – an interactive tool mapping bovine tuberculosis (bTB) outbreaks in England and Wales over the previous 10 years

IFN- $\gamma$  – Interferon Gamma Assay blood test

IR – Inconclusive Reactor

LIP – Livestock Information Programme

NVL – No Visible Lesions

NFU – National Farmers Union

OTF – Officially TB free status

OV – Official Veterinarian

PME – Post Mortem Examination

RBT – Risk Based Trading

RPW – Rural Payment Wales

SAM – APHA's online TB management IT system

SICCT – Single Intradermal Comparative Cervical Tuberculin skin test

T&FG – Task and Finish Group

TB – *Mycobacterium bovis* aka bovine tuberculosis

ToR – Terms of Reference