

National Audit Office backs Badger Trust on bovine TB testing and biosecurity

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The Badger Trust has welcomed a new National Audit Office (NAO) report into Defra's management of livestock diseases[1]. The damning report backs the Badger Trust's calls for tougher enforcement of bovine TB testing and biosecurity on farms.

The NAO recommends that Defra and the Rural Payments Agency should make better use of "prompt testing and removal of infected animals, and action to reduce risk through bio-security and animal husbandry measures".

The report criticises the Government for the "absence of standards and adequate data on farm bio-security" and says that bovine TB compensation should provide "incentives for farmers to follow good standards of bio-security and husbandry, and corresponding penalties if reasonable steps to prevent disease have not been taken".

It says that the "effectiveness of the routine testing regime for bovine tuberculosis is undermined by the weakness of existing enforcement arrangements" and warns that "bovine tuberculosis has spread undetected to new farms from farms where disease is detected because of failure to carry out additional tests on neighbouring farms in good time".

The NAO report follows revelations published by the Badger Trust in 2008 that up to half a million cattle could be overdue for their bovine TB test at any one time[2], due to the lack of farmer co-operation with the testing regime. The report is also a blow to farming unions, because – in line with scientific advice to Government – it makes no recommendations for badger culling.

Badger Trust chairman, David Williams, commented: "The NAO has laid the blame for the spread of bovine TB at the door of the hopelessly inadequate testing regime and poor standards of herd biosecurity. Bovine TB is spread by cattle to cattle and the refusal of the farming unions to recognise the grotesque scale of this problem is wilful ignorance of the worst kind. We hope, now, that the Government will start to enforce tougher testing compliance and herd biosecurity to get this disease under control.

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For further comment, contact David Williams on 07768 518064.

Notes to editors:

1. The NAO report can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/byllqz>
2. Half a million cattle are overdue for their TB test, Badger Trust reveals, press release, 5 November 2008.

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.

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