TB breaches cost dairy farm £14,340

The Badger Trust is appalled that a farm in Cornwall, an area which has suffered from bovine tuberculosis for decades, not only moved cattle while under TB restrictions but also entered a major pedigree cattle show in Warwickshire. Fifty-eight passports for dead cattle were found on the premises. Wills Bros Ltd, of Pawton Dairy, Wadebridge, was fined £7,200 and ordered to pay costs of £7,140. It had pleaded guilty at Bodmin Magistrates' Court to seven offences under tuberculosis and cattle identification legislation.

Patricia Hayden, Vice Chairman of the Badger Trust, said: "These offences were committed in the heart of a major bTB hotspot. They risked the health of prime stock at a major cattle show and the wellbeing of pedigree herds and farm businesses all over the country. The discovery of so many passports overdue for return to the British Cattle Movement Service also raises serious questions about the reliability of the system. Transparency is crucial when bovine tuberculosis is causing serious economic harm to farm businesses.

"If other cattle at the show had been infected, unthinking advocates of culling badgers would have been quick to claim their case had been proved. As it is, many farmers in Cornwall could yet be licensed to shoot badgers in the mistaken belief that it will help to eradicate the disease.

"We have been warning the industry for almost 30 years about the danger of moving untested cattle and we have welcomed the belated controls of the last five years. As happened 50 years ago those controls now seem to be succeeding [1] without killing any badgers."

After the case, John Pascoe, manager of the animal health team in Cornwall's trading standards department said it had not been the first time his inspectors had found problems with cattle passports. They should be returned within seven days of the death of an animal under the Cattle Identification Regulations 2007 [2].

The court heard the restrictions had been imposed after an inconclusive reactor had been found at the dairy during a pre-movement TB test. This should have prevented any unlicensed movements on or off the premises for at least 60 days.

Investigators from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Cornwall Council Trading Standards found:

- Cattle had been moved between premises run by the dairy without TB pre-movement testing; passports had not been completed;
- 58 cattle passports were found on the premises for cattle which had died more than seven days previously;
- The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) had not been informed;
- DNA tests of the suspect animal found no biological link between it and the animal registered as its mother;

- At the re-test 60 days later the animal was still not identified.

Mr. Pascoe commented: “It is vitally important for the farming industry to adhere to these controls which enable rapid tracing of animal movements. Non compliances such as those found can have devastating effects for the whole of the farming industry if a disease situation developed”.

NOTES

[1] An extrapolation of Defra’s January to September 2010 provisional statistics shows a steady decline over two consecutive years in England from the high point of 38,973 cattle slaughtered in 2008 to an (estimated) 33,000 by the end of 2010 – without killing badgers or any other wildlife. This would be even faster than the decline in the 1960s.

[2] See CIR 2007 Part III Schedule 4 para 2 Notification of Death (3).
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/529/schedule/4/made

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