Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Bovine TB Eradication Advisory Group (TBEAG) for England

52nd TBEAG meeting – 6 December 2018

1. Introduction

The chair opened the meeting. Apologies were received and noted.

2. TB Programme Update

The Deputy Director gave a policy update.

2.1 Bovine TB Strategy Review:

In November the Government published the report of the independent review of its 25-Year Bovine TB Strategy for England, led by Professor Sir Charles Godfray FRS. Ministers will consider its recommendations before publishing a response next year setting out the next steps for the Strategy. The report’s key themes are around governance; surveillance and diagnostics; vaccination and genetic resistance in cattle; risk based trading; disease in wildlife; the disease in non-bovines; biosecurity; British farming post CAP and research.

As a consequence of EU Exit planning work, four members from the TB Strategy Review team have now moved temporarily to EU Exit roles.

2.2 Cattle controls

On 1 November 2018 the following changes to TB compensation came into force:

- payments reduced by 50% for i) cattle brought into breakdown herds that become reactors before restrictions are lifted; and ii) TB reactors so unclean that the slaughterhouse cannot process them; and
- To support farmers who decide to privately slaughter their TB affected cattle, we will pay compensation if the carcase is fully condemned by FSA meat inspectors.

The pilot to extend the use of non-veterinary TB testers to private practices has started.

As part of the next TB moment Defra will be announcing the introduction of earned recognition in the Edge from May 2019. This will allow those at lower risk of a TB breakdown to revert to annual testing. The change will apply to herds that have not had a TB breakdown for 6 years (and have been in existence for 6 years) and herds that are CHeCS accredited at level 1 or higher.
Since November 2016, APHA have sent notification letters to LRA herd owners sourcing cattle that would potentially need a post movement test. Now that the policy has bedded in, and in light of budget pressures, we are currently considering whether to stop sending these letters.

APHA has notified relevant keepers via letter and guidance has been published on gov.uk.

2.3 Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme (BEVS)
A second application round is due to open for vaccination projects starting in 2019. We anticipate receiving at least 5-6 applications.

2.4 Biosecurity
Defra will publish its future work plan for bio-security shortly. This has been developed with Welsh Government and industry partners. The report gives an update on progress since the original action plan was published and summarises further actions agreed.

2.7 Communications
Publication of the report of the TB Strategy Review on 13 November 2018 has led to a peak in correspondence. The report received coverage in national media.

3. TB Eradication Strategy Review
On 13 November 2018, the Government published the report of the independent review of its 25-Year Bovine TB Strategy for England, led by Professor Sir Charles Godfray FRS. The report is with Ministers who will consider its recommendations before publishing a response next year setting out the next steps for the Strategy. The report’s key themes are around governance; surveillance and diagnostics; vaccination and genetic resistance in cattle; risk based trading; disease in wildlife; the disease in non-bovines; biosecurity; British farming post CAP and research.

Discussions followed with the Group who were asked to focus on two aspects of the independent review’s conclusions and options for the future:

4. Policy and delivery updates

Reactor removal
Reactor Removal – Update was provided on:
1. The Reactor Removal Framework implemented in December 2017
2. APHA reactor removal performance data for removal times since April 2017
It demonstrates that the new Framework has resulted in improvements in animal welfare, most notably a reduction in the distances animals travel to slaughter, as well as improved resilience and financial benefits to Government. The reactor removal times for the year 2017/18 have improved markedly on the previous operational year, partly due to resolution of staffing issues in the APHA team delivering this work but also as a result of the new Framework.

Members were impressed with the report and the work that had gone into the reactor removal framework. The reactor removal target will be kept under review and APHA will strive to improve it. A member asked what is defined as a farmer delay. Farmer delay examples would include situations when APHA is unable to contact farmers, lost tags, passport issues.

A member asked if these figures include non-bovines. APHA responded to say that these figures are for cattle only. There is a separate non-bovine reactor removal framework.

APHA is always striving to improve and significant improvements have been made under the new framework.

5. Livestock Information Service (LIS)

The chair updated the group on LIS:

- Rapid pace of programme
- Extent of government funding still unknown – SoS has put a bid in to HM Treasury but competition for funding is intense across government and within the department
- Relationship between industry (non-statutory customer), government (statutory customer) and AHDB (delivery host) takes great deal of coordination
- Four formal boards – industry non-statutory board, Defra LIP board, AHDB board and LIP team board. All boards represented on joint LIP board with input from government digital service etc.
- Invitation to tender will go out soon for the LIS digital platform/

Focusing on bovines initially, then sheep, pigs in that order.

6. TB Advisory Service (TBAS)

Update provided by Westpoint Farm Vets. Main points are as follows

- 500 advice visits completed so far (nearly 100 over the last month)
- 230 telephone advice calls
- TBAS ‘roadshow’ to different counties in Edge/HRA in partnership with APHA
- TBAS forming links with Trading Standards and APHA field offices
- Good relationship with National Trust – TBAS visits in areas where culling is not taking place
• 84 consultants (68 active) – 21 independent, 33 vets from other practices, 14 WestPoint vets
• Real demand for advice from farmers in the LRA

TBAS has organised two meetings in Shropshire and this has led to the formation of a local TBEG group chaired by a local vet and with NFU and APHA input.

7. Next steps TBEAG/TBEG meet and greet

Views were invited from TBEAG members on the Meet and Greet meeting held in October 2018. The group provided feedback:

• Really good provision of information and about the right length
• Great agenda
• Shared experiences during table talks
• Extend invite further e.g. to Local Authorities? (Steph Young)
• Appetite to repeat the day as it was a good model
• It shouldn’t get too big i.e. still intimate enough for open discussion and not a conference
• Bristol good location
• Bring along another TBEG member instead of chair/secretariat
• Could regionalise and make several events
• Perhaps more opportunity for small group discussions e.g. maybe an evening meal
• An event like this helps to energise local APHA/Defra
• Is it worth having a representative from the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA) attending?
• It will be good to showcase all the bTb eradication work going on with TBEGs groups, at this type of event

8. Progress on specification for Biosecurity Finishing Units (BFU)

Defra/APHA officials discussed the paper with TBEAG members on developing a possible new bio-secure finishing unit model. At an earlier TBEAG meeting in April, the NFU and an operator of an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) with grazing presented a proposal for an alternative type of TB unit called a Bio secure finishing unit (BFU) to replace AFUs with grazing in the HRA. TBEAG members had some significant concerns with their proposal, in particular that it did not sufficiently address biosecurity concerns.

TBEAG, recognising the importance of providing an outlet for owners of TB affected herds with surplus calves, asked officials to try and work up a more ‘acceptable’ model with industry. The shared paper sets out the proposed key operating conditions that TBP and APHA recommend should be prescribed for the proposed new finishing unit model. This model would be more bio-secure than an AFU with grazing e.g. restricted to calves only and the calves would have to be housed and clear two TB tests before being moved to
grazing. Subject to TBEAG’s agreement Defra would now carry out a targeted consultation.

TBEAG members were broadly supportive – and agreed the proposed consultation - although some concerns were raised. Discussions followed.

9. Epidemiological update – South West counties

Epidemiology update on the 7 counties in the South West was provided. It covered the latest county level crude herd incidence and prevalence rates along with reactor numbers, slaughterhouse cases, persistent breakdowns, and BCP coverage and gamma usage.

10. AOB

Next meeting: 13 February 2019.