

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Strategy for Achieving “Officially Bovine Tuberculosis Free” Status for England: an ‘edge area’ strategy

Bovine TB Information Note 04/13

August 2013

Contents

Introduction	1
What is the 'edge area'?	1
What is the aim of the edge area strategy?	3
Why have we developed an edge area strategy?	3
New measures for the edge area.....	5
What will cattle owners need to do and when?	5
Q&A	6
I have a holding in the edge area. Does that mean there is a high risk of a bTB breakdown?.....	6
I have a holding in the HRA or LRA and have a CTS link with a holding in the edge area. Do I need to contact BCMS straight away to remove this link?	6
Are all holdings within the edge considered a high bTB risk?	6
My holding is already suffering a bTB breakdown. Will I be affected by the changes?	6
Where can I find out further information about whether my holding is in the 'edge' area or not?	7
What happens to my existing Sole Occupancy Authority (SOA)?	7
Contacts.....	7
Annex A	8
Overview of additional cattle measures in the edge area strategy	8
Cattle measures	8
Badger measures.....	8
Breakdown handling.....	9
Engagement/training	9
Risk-based trading	9
Annex B – 2012 OTFW/OTFS data for counties in the edge	11

Introduction

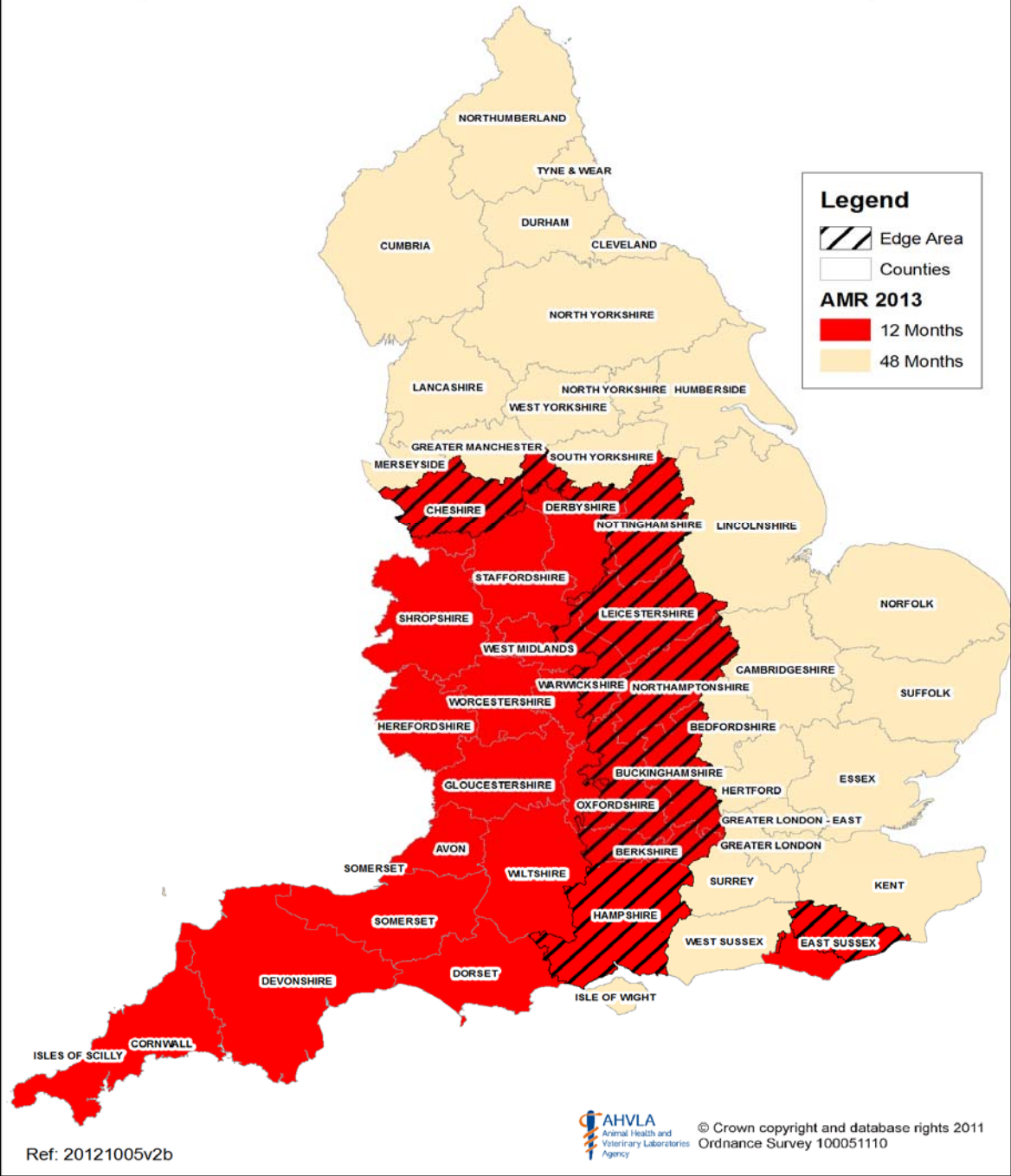
On 4th July Defra launched a public consultation on a new draft strategy for achieving Officially TB Free (OTF) status for the whole of England within 25 years. The draft strategy states that we will be introducing new policies designed to stop and reverse the spread of bovine TB (bTB) at the frontier of the disease, known as the 'edge area', ahead of the outcome of the consultation exercise on the wider strategy.

What is the 'edge area'?

The 'edge area' is one of three types of bTB risk area identified in the strategy ('high risk area' (HRA), 'edge' and 'low risk area' (LRA)). The 'edge' is a geographical area at the edge of the current annual testing area where we do not have evidence that bTB is endemic but where infection is either currently spreading or which is at risk of disease spread in the short to medium term.

It consists of some entire counties (Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Hampshire) and some part-counties (Cheshire, Derbyshire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and East Sussex).

Area to which the edge action plan will be applied



Map 1 - Area in which the edge action plan will be applied

What is the aim of the edge area strategy?

The edge area strategy aims to focus effort on containing and then reversing the spread of bTB to achieve OTF status for the edge area counties by:

- identifying where disease is emerging and publicise this information locally so that cattle keepers are better equipped to reduce their bTB risks;
- taking effective measures to stamp out the disease when found; and
- preventing the disease from re-emerging by addressing the causes of breakdowns.

Why have we developed an edge area strategy?

Evidence shows that the HRA is expanding towards the north and east of England and the levels of TB are increasing in the edge area. Often what we see are clusters of OTF-status Suspended herd breakdowns happening in an area. Over time, we then see an increase in OTF-status Withdrawn herd breakdowns in the area. Therefore halting the spread of disease is a key part of achieving bTB freedom for England. The spread of disease in the edge area is likely to be caused by cattle movements, as well as badger-to-cattle transmission.

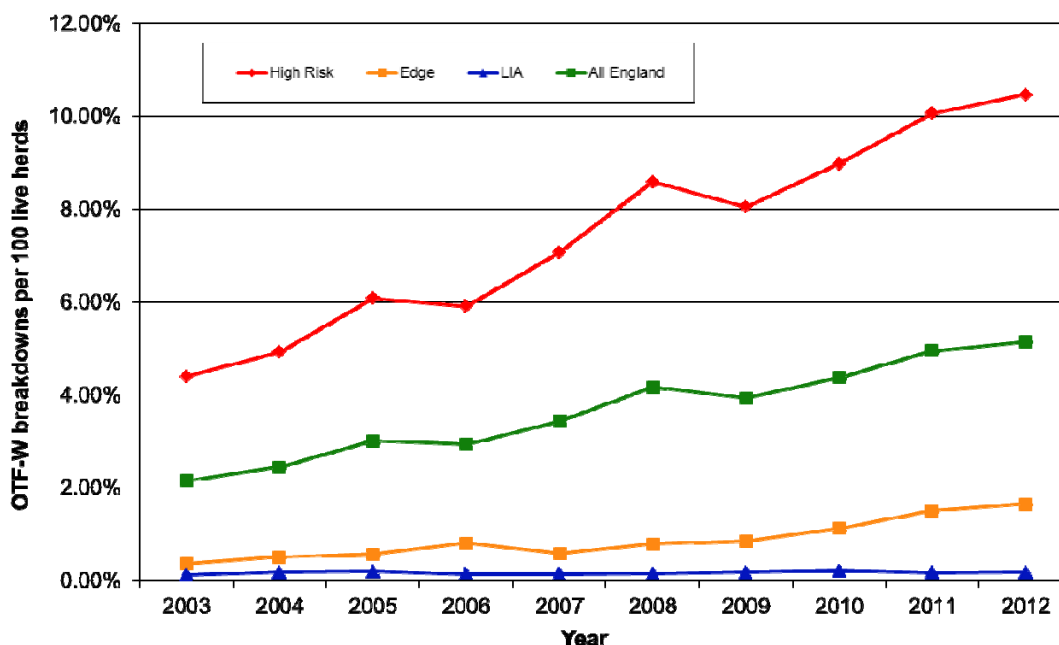


Figure 1: Variation in the number of OTF-Withdrawn new bovine TB breakdowns per 100 live herds between 2003 and 2012 by Risk Area

County No	County
1	Bedfordshire
2	Berkshire
3	Buckinghamshire
4	Cleveland
5	Cambridgeshire
6	Cheshire
7	Cornwall
8	Cumbria
9	Derbyshire
10	Devonshire
11	Dorset
12	Durham
13	Essex
14	Gloucestershire
15	Hampshire
16	Isle of Wight
17	Hereford & Worcester
18	Hertford
20	Kent
21	Lancashire
22	Leicester
24	Lincolnshire
25	Merseyside
26	Greater London - East
27	Greater London
28	Norfolk
29	Northamptonshire
30	Tyne & Wear
31	Northumberland
32	Nottinghamshire
33	Oxfordshire
34	Avon
35	Shropshire
36	Somerset
37	Staffordshire
38	Suffolk
39	Isles of Scilly
40	Surrey
41	East Sussex
42	West Sussex
43	Warwickshire
44	Greater Manchester
45	Wiltshire
46	West Midlands
47	South Yorkshire
48	North Yorkshire
49	West Yorkshire
50	North Yorkshire
51	Humberside
52	North/South Powys
52	North/South Powys
53	Gwynedd
55	Dyfed
56	Clwyd
57	South Glamorgan
58	Mid Glamorgan
59	West Glamorgan
60	Gwent

2012 OTFW INCIDENTS

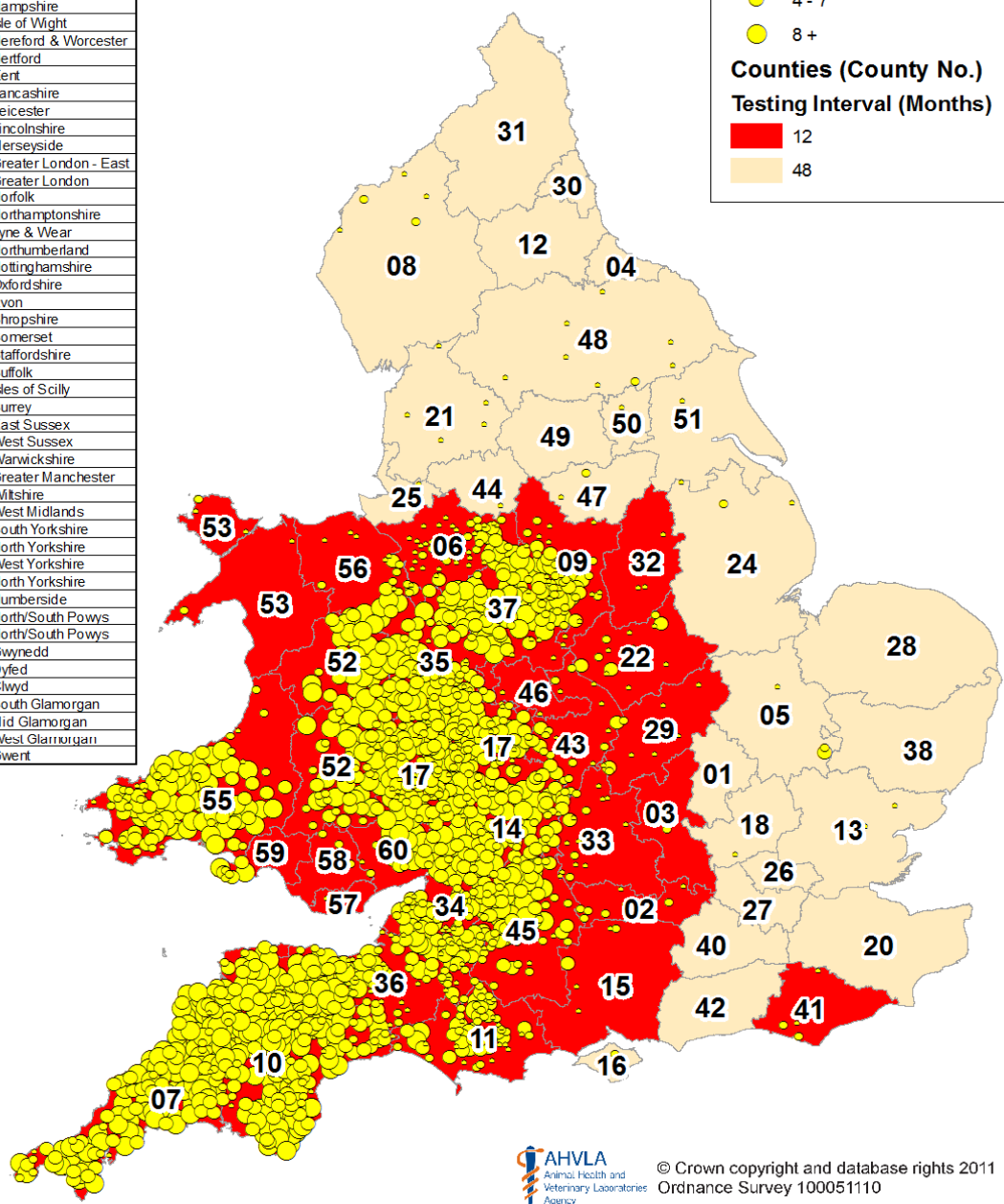
Incidents Per Parish 2012

- 1
- 2 - 3
- 4 - 7
- 8 +

Counties (County No.)

Testing Interval (Months)

- 12
- 48



ProductReference: 35

AHVL
Animal Health and
Veterinary Laboratories
Agency

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Map 2 – location of OTF-Withdrawn TB breakdowns in 2012

New measures for the edge area

Defra are introducing a number of enhanced cattle controls in the edge area from October 2013. Some of these measures may be targeted in particular areas (for example in Cheshire and Derbyshire where we have the greatest concerns about the implication of disease spread). Some measures will be compulsory across the whole of the edge area, whilst others may be used on a case by case basis where veterinary experts feel that they will help disease control. An overview of these changes is provided at annex A.

There will be a wider use of interferon-gamma testing in some herds and more strict skin test requirements in others which may mean that some herds spend a longer period under TB restrictions than is currently the case. In Cheshire and Derbyshire, cattle herds within 3km of a bTB OTF-status Withdrawn (OTFW) breakdown will also be tested to provide assurance that the disease has not spread locally. One of the key changes will be Defra and the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) working closely with cattle industry representatives and farmers to ensure more information on the local disease situation is provided to local cattle farmers.

Defra has already started to implement some of the elements of the edge area strategy. For example, since January 2013 all herds in the edge area have been on annual TB testing. When the annually tested area was expanded in January 2013 we continued to apply the IFN-gamma blood test in the same way that we had previously (eg for those herds that were on 2, 3 or 4-yearly testing).

What will cattle owners need to do and when?

We plan to roll out the new changes in October 2013. We will be writing to cattle keepers in the edge area with further details about the new measures and when they will take effect. Official veterinarians (OV) and local AHVLA offices will also be able to provide further information, especially if cattle keepers are directly affected by these changes as a result of a bTB breakdown.

From 12th August cattle keepers will not be able to establish CTS links where one holding is in the edge area and another holding is in a different TB risk area. Instead a number of other options will be available and these can be found in Information Note 05/13. The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) will write to individual cattle keepers affected by the removal of CTS links, which will take place from the start of October. BCMS staff will contact cattle keepers a month before the links are about to expire and talk cattle keepers through the various options available.

There will also be a series of independently-run workshops for cattle keepers and Official Veterinarians in the edge area to get more information about bTB in the edge area and measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of bTB. Further details will be announced shortly.

Q&A

I have a holding in the edge area. Does that mean there is a high risk of a bTB breakdown?

No. If you are in the edge area, you are not necessarily at a high risk of undergoing a breakdown, but there is a risk that the level of bTB in your area will increase if we do not do something to tackle this spread of disease. In some areas there is a higher risk than others (eg in Cheshire and Derbyshire). This is why we are introducing an edge area specific strategy.

I have a holding in the HRA or LRA and have a CTS link with a holding in the edge area. Do I need to contact BCMS straight away to remove this link?

No. BCMS will contact cattle keepers a month before the CTS link expires or is planned to be removed and will discuss the options. If the linked holdings are entirely within one type of risk area (eg high risk, low risk or 'edge') then cattle keepers won't be affected by these changes.

Are all holdings within the edge considered a high bTB risk?

No. Although we have considerably expanded the annually tested area, this does not mean that all parts of the annually tested area are at the same level of bTB risk. Even within the same risk area, individual holdings can pose different levels of bTB risks (for example a closed herd with good biosecurity may be a lower risk than a flying herd with poor biosecurity).

When selling cattle, cattle keepers are encouraged to provide further information about the status of their herd to demonstrate their level of risk. Buyers are encouraged to find out more information about the disease history of the cattle they are buying. A separate initiative, the risk-based trading project, will be looking to introduce best practice in the selling / buying of cattle.

My holding is already suffering a bTB breakdown. Will I be affected by the changes?

The new measures will apply to all new bTB breakdown situations. AHVLA and OV's may consider that some existing breakdowns may benefit from the additional measures but will discuss the options with you.

Where can I find out further information about whether my holding is in the 'edge' area or not?

Cattle keepers should look at the AHVLA website in the first instance. There will also be a spreadsheet that will show whether a holding is in the edge area or not.

What happens to my existing Sole Occupancy Authority (SOA)?

Under the current policy you can retain your existing SOA but are not allowed to add new holdings to it. Where you have a SOA that spans the annual and four-yearly testing area, the current policy is that you must pre-movement test for any movements between different parts of the SOA. We are considering how best to address pre-movement testing requirements between different parts of SOAs that are completely within the annually tested area (including those that span the edge and HRA).

Contacts

If you have any further questions on how these changes will affect you, please contact your local AHVLA office. Contact details are available at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/about-us/contact-us/>

Annex A

Overview of additional cattle measures in the edge area strategy

Cattle measures

- Officially TB free status Suspended (OTFS) herds will require two successive short interval tests with negative results at severe interpretation before restrictions are lifted. All holdings which have suffered breakdowns within the edge area will continue to have a check-test at six-months after restrictions are lifted, before returning to annual whole herd testing. [Compulsory measure for the whole of the edge area]
- Interferon-gamma blood testing of holdings suffering a bTB breakdown with OTF status Withdrawn (OTFW) [Compulsory measure for all OTFW breakdowns in the edge area]
- 3km radial testing of holdings within (or straddling) a 3km radius around an OTFW breakdown. These holdings will be subject to an immediate skin test, followed by an additional test after 6 months before reverting back to annual testing. [Compulsory measure in the edge areas of Cheshire and Derbyshire to start with – except where AHVLA consider that there are good veterinary reasons not to do so]
- Breaking of existing CTS links between the edge area and high risk area (HRA) and the non-approval of new links between these areas
- [Compulsory measure for the whole of the edge area]. In addition, from 12th August cattle keepers will not be able to establish CTS links where one holding is in the edge area and another holding is in a different TB risk area.
- Discretionary interferon-gamma blood testing to in addition to the tuberculin skin test in OTFS herds [whole of the edge area]

Badger measures

Bovine TB is not just a disease in cattle. Badgers in particular are a recognised reservoir of the disease, particularly in the high risk area.

- Badger vaccination - We have widened the badger vaccination fund availability to the edge area. This will provide up to 50% of the costs of the first year of badger vaccination.

- Badger numbers in the edge – We currently know very little on the infection status of badgers in the edge area and will work to gather and disseminate information on their density and prevalence of TB infection.

Breakdown handling

- Enhanced breakdown management
 - Providing AHVLA vets working in the field with the specialised GIS support that they need to capture information on the local area, and to look at what is happening at a regional level, supported by wider AHVLA bTB epidemiology analyses.
- Quarterly regional epidemiology reports from AHVLA regional offices, shared with local stakeholders to enable them to tailor their approach to bTB at the local level.

Engagement/training

- Training for AHVLA vets on the new measures, particularly on how to apply the discretionary measures and carrying out the enhanced breakdown management. We will also be discussing the new measures with OVs and looking at how they can become more involved in breakdown management.
- Farmer and private vet engagement events - Training events will be held throughout the edge area to inform farmers of the policy, what it means for farms in the edge, and what can be done to control bTB in their herds (such as improved biosecurity, including risk-based trading).
- Improved information sharing between AHVLA, farmers, vets, and other stakeholders at the local level by engaging with local stakeholder boards and providing farmers and vets with quarterly summaries of the local epidemiological situation.

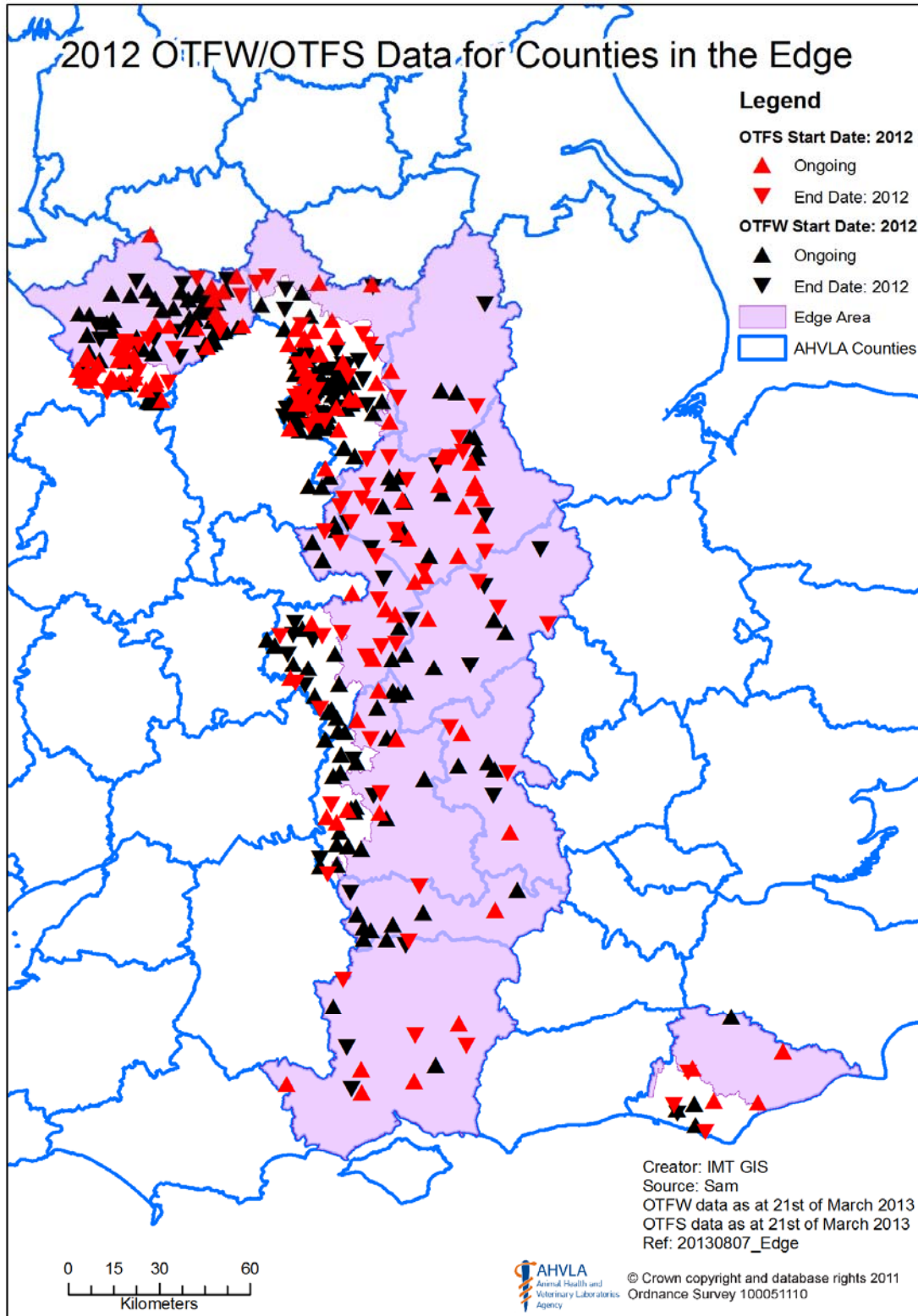
Risk-based trading

- Farmers are encouraged to find out more information about the status of the cattle that they are buying. The Bovine TB Risk Based Trading Group has published a report (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193647/rbtg-final-report.pdf) to develop some voluntary measures for risk-based trading to help reduce the risk of spread of bTB. Risk-based trading encourages farmers to consider the relative disease risk of animals that they are buying, which leads to better informed cattle trading decisions and better management of bTB risk as part of wider efforts to stop the spread of bTB. Defra will work with industry to take forward the recommendations from this report.

We will also continue annual tuberculin herd testing regime across the edge area, supplemented with mandatory pre-movement testing of cattle.

Other possible discretionary measures - These include the use of the bovine tuberculin-only interpretation of the skin-test; whole herd depopulation; the slaughter of inconclusive reactors within breakdowns; and contiguous testing in response to confirmed *M. bovis* TB infection in wildlife or non-bovine animals.

Annex B – 2012 OTFW/OTFS data for counties in the edge



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This document/publication is also available on our website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/series/bovine-tb-information-notes>

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