Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.defra.gov.uk

[redacted]

Your ref: EIR 5535
Date:28th July 2013

Dear [redacted],

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Testing of Cattle for bovine TB

Thank you for your request for information about the testing of cattle for bovine TB, which we received on 01/06/2013. As you know, we have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Question 1: What is the total number of cattle killed each year that failed the bovine TB reactor test (state the number of unborn calves affected)?

Detailed statistics on the numbers of cattle tested each year for bovine TB, including the numbers of negative test results, is published on Defra's website at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/incidence-of-tuberculosis-tb-in-cattle-in-great-britain. Information on the number of unborn calves culled is not collected.

Question 2: What is the percentage of those killed (as result of the reactor test) that proved not to have Bovine TB following the culture test results when they were dead (state what number of unborn calves were affected)?

It is not right to suggest that negative culture results from TB test positive animals mean that the animals in question were TB free. Although no diagnostic test is 100% perfect the skin test we use does have a high specificity – scientific evidence shows that when applied to cattle without TB in GB there is a 1 in 1000 chance that a non-infected animal will be wrongly classified as a reactor. It is impossible to identify which TB test positive cattle were not truly infected (i.e. false positives) but it would be a very small proportion of the total number of reactors.

Question 3: How many of the carcases in each case as in (1) & (2) were allowed into the human and or pet food chain following dispatch?

Defra and the FSA does not collect the data requested because it is not required in order to maintain food safety or to assess the public health risk in relation to bovine TB and meat. The risks are controlled by the inspection regime in place. All carcasses which pass inspections are considered fit for human consumption.

The FSA's role in relation to TB controls is to ensure that all meat that enters the food chain is fit for human consumption through ante and post mortem meat inspection of both compulsorily slaughtered cattle and those identified at routine post mortem as possibly being infected with *M. bovis*. Where inspection reveals tuberculosis lesions in more than one organ or region of the carcase, it is declared unfit for human consumption. However, when a tuberculosis lesion has been found in the lymph nodes of only one organ or part of the carcase, only the affected organ or part of the carcase and the associated lymph nodes are declared unfit for human consumption.

Question 4: Is it true that cattle that are immune to Bovine TB are likely to fail the reactor test as result of their immunity to Bovine TB?

Where effective vaccination or treatment are not available to control an infectious disease (as in the case of bovine TB), it is essential to detect and remove all infected animals early, before they become infectious. The single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin (SICCT) test, commonly known as the tuberculin "skin test" is one of the internationally accepted standards for detection of bovine TB in live cattle. The test works by detecting the animal's immune response to *Mycobacterium bovis* (the bovine TB bacterium), rather than looking for the bacterium itself. This is because bovine TB is a chronic disease in which very low numbers of bacteria may be present in recently or latently infected animals. Nevertheless, a positive response to the skin test (or the interferon gamma blood test deployed in TB breakdown herds) still indicates that an animal is likely to have been infected with *M. bovis* and is potentially capable of infecting other animals at the time of detection or sometime in the future. Furthermore, studies conducted in AHVLA Weybridge in which latent TB infection was induced in cattle experimentally infected with *M. bovis,* have shown that such animals only a limited degree of protection against subsequent challenge with virulent bovine TB bacteria. Hence, the need for regular herd testing and rapid removal of all skin (and gamma interferon) test reactors.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs, and in keeping with the government's Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on www.gov.uk together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you.

I also attach Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours,

Defra TB Programme
Ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Annex A

Copyright

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by copyright. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including for private study and non-commercial research, and for any other purpose authorised by an exception in current copyright law. Documents (except photographs or logos) can be also used in the UK without requiring permission for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder.

Most documents produced by Defra will be protected by Crown Copyright. Most Crown copyright information can be re-used under the Open Government Licence. For information about the OGL and about re-using Crown Copyright information please see The National Archives website.
Copyright in other documents may rest with a third party. For information about obtaining permission from a third party see the Intellectual Property Office's website.

Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF