



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# **2020 Bovine TB Statistics for GB - User Survey**

Response to User Engagement

Date: November 2020

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We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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PB 14638

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bovine-tb>

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# 2020 Bovine TB Statistics User Survey

## Response

### Foreword

This document summarises the responses to the bovine TB (bTB) Statistics User Survey and outlines the next steps statisticians will take in the development of the release.

Our statistics publications follow the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The code requires us to regularly engage with users and ask them how our statistics could be improved. It was a survey and not a formal consultation exercise. This is consistent with the guidance in the Code of Practice for Statistics. The survey was designed to:

- find out how the statistics are used
- find out if the statistics are fit for purpose
- seek feedback on possible changes
- provide an opportunity to suggest innovations.

The survey ran for six weeks from 17 June to 31 July 2020. It was announced in the bTB Quarterly Statistics release, Quarterly pre- and post- movement testing statistical release, and Monthly Official bTB Statistics release. The DefraStats Twitter account posted a link to the survey. Members of the bTB Eradication Advisory Group for England (TBEAG) were alerted and asked to share the link with their local contacts. The [background to the survey webpage](#) is still available to view.

This document follows the structure of the survey, with each question in order, analysis of responses received, and follow up actions from the statisticians.

### Volume of responses received

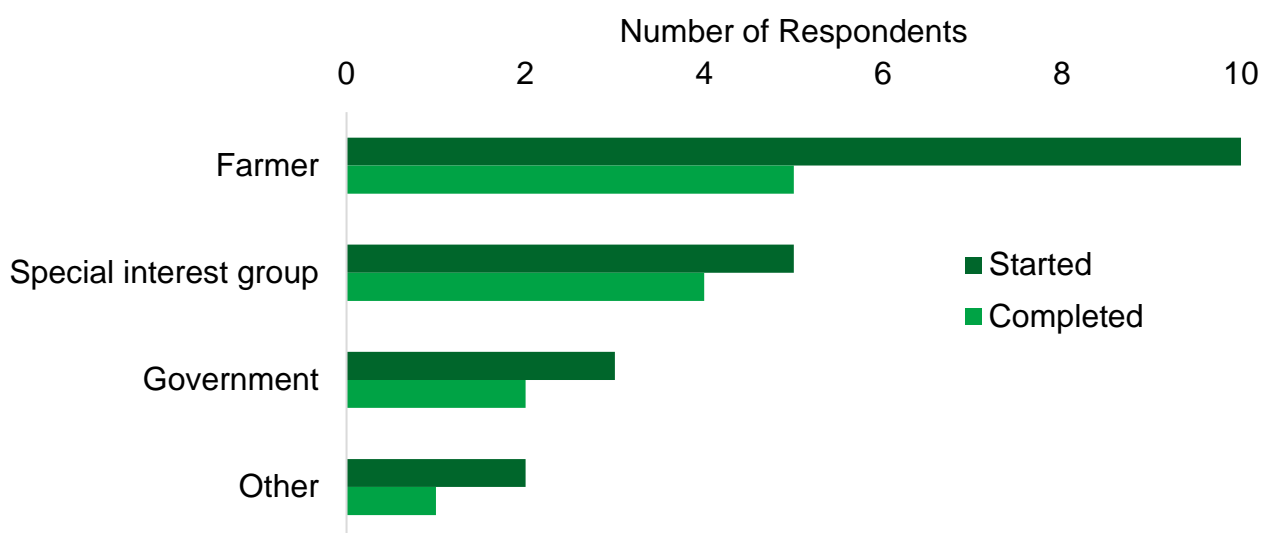
Twenty five respondents started the survey with useable answers received from around half that amount for most questions. In addition the National Farmers' Union (NFU) submitted written comments separately. From Google analytics we are aware that approximately 120 people access the bTB statistics landing webpage on a monthly basis. Seven respondents to the survey indicated they accessed the quarterly National Statistics on any frequency above 1 out of 4 releases a year. Therefore, we need to exercise caution in extrapolating the results of the survey to be representative of the views of all users. In particular government users are likely to be under-represented as they have other means of communicating with the statistics producers.

## Q1 – Backgrounds of respondents

So that we can understand who is using our bTB statistics, from which broad sector are you responding?

There were 19 responses to Q1: Farmer (10), special interest group (5), government (3) and other (2). One respondent selected two answers.

Figure 1 – Backgrounds of respondents that a) started the survey, b) finished the survey



## Q2 – Satisfaction

Indicate your satisfaction level with the GB bTB statistics publications overall in terms of Code of Practice pillars of Quality, Value and Trust.

Sixteen respondents answered this question, 9 of whom were farmers, with the other 7 being a mixture of government and special interest group representatives. In general responses to this question were spread evenly across the five options. Highest positive counts were for trust (8) and highest negative levels were with quality (6). The most noticeable trend among respondents' satisfaction levels was the much lower satisfaction levels from respondents who were farmers than from those who were not.

### Value – usefulness and relevance

The distribution of responses to this question were symmetrical, with equal numbers of respondents picking "Very Satisfied" as did "Very Dissatisfied", likewise for "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied". However, none of the negative responses came from non-farmers, while only one of the positive responses came from a farmer. This could indicate that the published statistics are of most use to those whose interest in bTB is relevant at the national or regional level, but farmers may be more concerned with activities at the local level, and thus may not be able to derive as much value from the published statistics. This pillar also received the most "Neutral" responses, which may be a reflection of how

respondents use the published statistics – those who just read them for general interest may not see that usage as particularly relevant or useful if they derive no commercial or academic benefit from reading the publications.

## Quality

There was a similar pattern among the responses to the question about quality, with a spread of answers, aggregated by interest group. All but one of the positive responses came from non-farmers, while all of the negative responses came from farmers.

## Trustworthiness

The pattern continued into the question on trustworthiness, with only one farmer giving a rating higher than “Neutral”, and no negative responses coming from non-farmers. The wording of this question could have caused farmers to conflate “producers of statistics” with the wider Defra bTB Programme, or could represent the absence of desired information that end-users may believe exists, but believe is being withheld from publication.

**Figure 2 – Average satisfaction per Code of Practice Pillar**

Pillar	Farmers Average Satisfaction scale 1-5 (count = 9)	Non-Farmers Average Satisfaction scale 1-5 (count =7)
Value	2.3	3.9
Quality	2.2	4.3
Trustworthiness	2.4	4.6

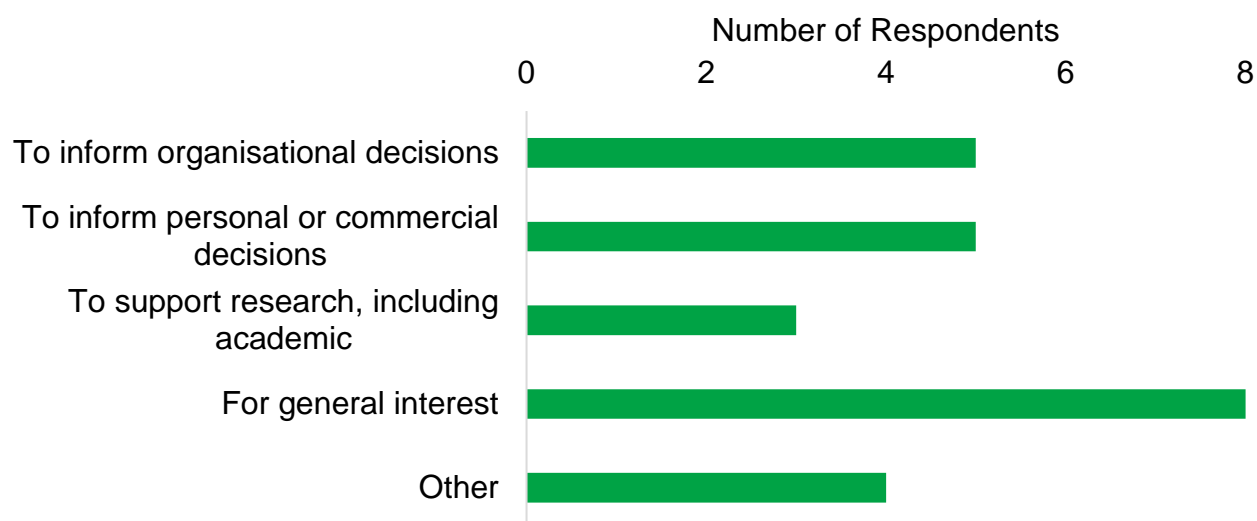
### **bTB statisticians’ response:**

The Statistics Code of Practice pillars of quality, value and trust can seem an abstract concept to those not familiar with the detail of the code. Responses to this question are useful in helping us gauge where to make improvements to our suite of outputs to meet diverse user needs.

### Q3 - What do you use GB bTB statistics for?

Sixteen respondents answered this question. Respondents were able to choose multiple options. The most popular option was “General Interest” with 8 respondents picking this, while “to Support Research” received the fewest responses with 4. Organisational and personal decisions were evenly split, with 5 responses each.

Figure 3 – Uses of the statistics



Responses indicating usage for organisational or research purposes all came from non-farmer respondents. All respondents who were farmers indicated usage either solely for general interest or for personal/commercial use, except for one who also indicated organisational use.

The four respondents who selected “Other” provided additional comments about what they use the published statistics for. All expressed a desire to utilise the statistics to measure the progress of the effort to eradicate bTB.

“To scrutinise the success of Government policy and progress towards eradication.”

“To hold government to account.”

“So I can keep abreast of the tb situation in case it spreads to affect my stock.”

“To track the progress of the bTB epidemic in GB and monitor the overall impact of the disease eradication policies in place.”

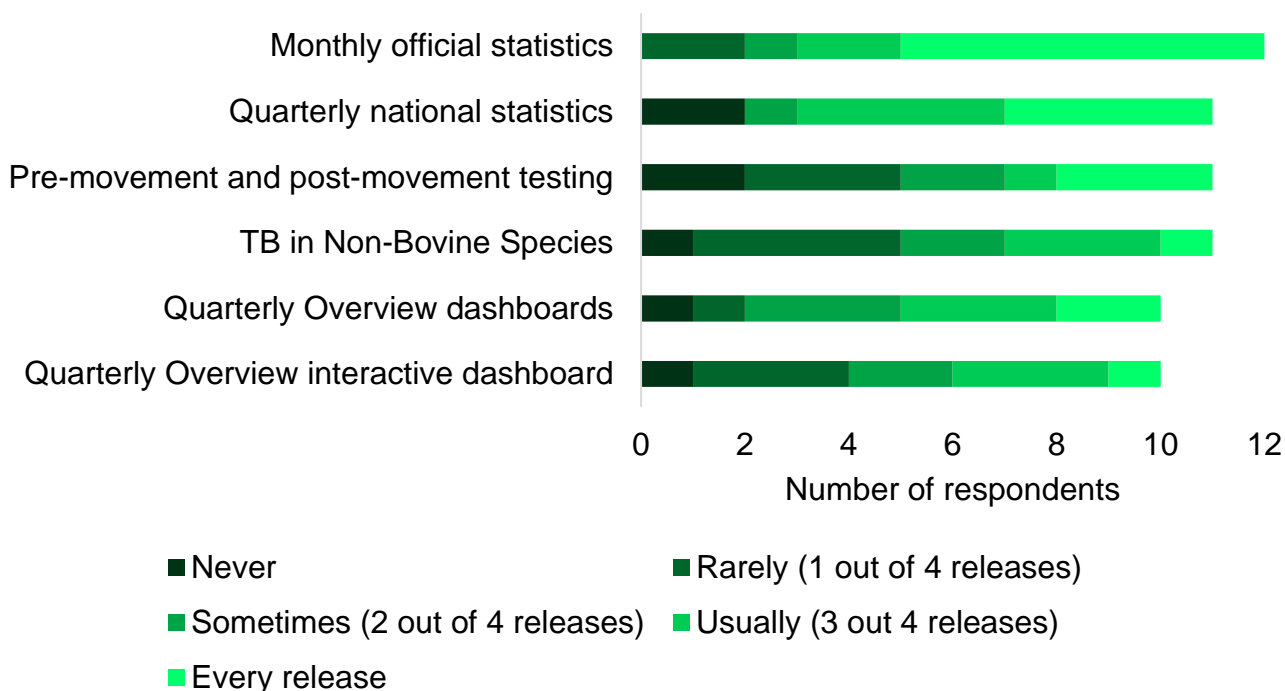
#### **bTB statisticians’ response:**

As mentioned in the foreword, we cannot take the survey responses to be representative for bTB statistics users as a whole. That said, the answer to this question adds context to the answers to the remaining questions on which outputs are most valued, and future of the monthly official statistics release.

## Q4 – Outputs used and frequency of use.

Between 10 and 12 respondents answered this question for each release. The monthly official statistics received the most responses indicating the respondents used every release (7) and was also the only release to receive no “Never” responses. The quarterly national statistics and pre- and post-movement statistics received the most “Never” responses with 2 each.

Figure 4 – Frequency of use



### bTB statisticians' response:

It is not unexpected that the TB in Non-Bovine Species dataset was viewed by few of the respondents to the survey. It is an ad hoc publication not pre-announced on the statistical release calendar. The quarterly pre- and post- movement testing official statistics release will be of interest to a subset of users that want to follow the trends in this particular set of TB tests, which are funded by farmers who sell cattle. The two quarterly overview dashboards contain the same information as the quarterly national statistics, so it is possible that some users do not need an additional way of accessing the data.



## Q5 – Preferred formats

**There are various ways we could provide the GB bTB statistics. Not all these formats are currently available. If they were provided, rank your preferred ways of accessing bTB statistics.**

Nine respondents answered this question. Respondents were asked to rank formats familiar to them by order of preference, with 1 being the best rank, 2 being second best, and running down accordingly. In the following table, each format's Familiarity is the percentage of respondents who did not list it as unfamiliar, and Preference is the average rank that each format was awarded by respondents who did not list it as unfamiliar. A lower average therefore indicates higher overall preference among respondents. Each format's rank within each of the two categories is presented in parenthesis. 78% of respondents were familiar with the PDF Statistical Notices, making this the most familiar format, while Machine Readable Files and Static Dashboards were least familiar with only 33%.

**Figure 5 – Familiarity and preference ranks**

Format	Familiarity (Rank)	Preference (Rank)
Statistical Notice (PDF)	78% (1)	2.7 (4)
Formatted Dataset (ODS)	44% (4)	1.5 (1)
Interactive Dashboard	67% (2)	2.3 (3)
HTML Web Page	56% (3)	2.8 (5)
Machine Readable Files (CSV)	33% (=5)	1.7 (2)
Static Dashboard	33% (=5)	3.3 (6)

Though the formats which present data in “raw” form were among the least familiar to respondents, respondents who were familiar with them showed a clear preference for them. Preference among other formats varied depending upon the individual respondent, suggesting that each of these formats has its own merits.

### **bTB statisticians' response:**

This question helps statisticians decide whether to devote resources to develop the releases in the current formats and introduce new ways of accessing the data.

## Q6 – County Herd Incidence

Currently the Quarterly National Statistics include Herd Incidence defined as new herd incidents per 100 herd years at risk, for GB countries, England risk areas, and Wales TB areas. County level data is not currently available. It is published annually in the Bovine TB Epidemiology reports. Would you find added value in quarterly county level incidence?

There were 12 responses to this question, with all respondents answering “Yes” except for one.

There were five comments accompanying answers to this question, of which a selection are presented below. The comments which were relevant to the question highlighted the potential usefulness of more granular statistics reporting for herd incidence particularly in the areas of higher bTB incidence. One respondent observed that county-level incidence values in the Low Risk Area might be heavily skewed by a single herd bTB incident (breakdown) detected during the year, due to the very low incidence of bTB in these counties. The general consensus was that it would not be harmful to have more detailed incidence data available. The respondent who answered “No” did not provide an additional comment.

“As long as the graph as above is also retained which shows collation as per bTB risk area. The data also expressed at county level using the 100 herd years at risk would be good addition.”

“There is such a moving picture now across the different counties, it’s more relevant to have it.”

“Nice to have only for counties in the High Risk and Edge Areas. In the LRA herd incidence trends are likely to be heavily skewed by single/very small numbers of new breakdowns.”

### **bTB Statisticians’ response:**

We will continue to work with APHA to develop the data required to populate tables from 1996. See also the response to [question 8](#).

## Q7 – County Prevalence

Currently the Quarterly National Statistics include Prevalence defined as the percentage of herds under restriction, for GB countries, England risk areas, and Wales TB areas. County level data is not currently available but can be derived by users from the published data by county: non-OTF herds divided by total herds registered. Would you find added value in county level prevalence?

Thirteen respondents answered this question, with only one of them responding “No”. There were four comments provided alongside the answers, which are presented below.

Responses indicated that county-level prevalence data would be welcome, but not necessarily essential. One respondent pointed out how this would provide more geographical detail than risk areas and TB areas, which would allow farmers to take this into account when purchasing cattle. The respondent who answered “No” did not provide an additional comment.

“As long as the existing graphs for bTB areas is also retained as well.”

“Nice one to have, but not essential.”

“I think it’s useful to compare neighbouring counties plus use county stats for helping to inform cattle purchases”

### **bTB Statisticians’ response:**

As indicated from the question, it is possible for users to calculate county prevalence by dividing the published series of herds under restriction by the count of registered active herds. It will be straightforward to include as in addition to the datasets.

## Q8 – Future of the monthly official statistics

**Currently the National Statistics are published quarterly, three months in arrears, including the calculation of the latest headline incidence rate for GB. In between the quarterly publications are monthly releases that are classed as official statistics. However short term changes in statistics should be considered in the context of long term trends. Focusing on the most recent fluctuations can be misleading. We are proposing that official statistics release and the underlying datasets are no longer published monthly. Individual monthly data would be available quarterly. Would you support this change?**

There were 13 answers to this question, with six providing additional comments. Though some respondents answered in support of this change (4), more than twice as many (9) stated that they would not support it. In their additional comments, respondents expressing opposition to the change highlighted their desire for statistics to continue to be published more regularly to accompany their own frequency of use. Respondents indicated a preference for regular up-to-date publications, and expressed understanding that monthly variations must be considered in the context of longer-term trends. One respondent who expressed support for the change did so on the condition that it would result in other publications' quality increasing.

“I still want the info and if these changes help to ensure that accurate data is available then I would support the change.”

“We fully understand that the monthly statistics should take account of short term fluctuations, but they are useful to see the changes on a monthly basis.”

“We need to be able to study the stats in a timely fashion. We understand and can allow for variation over short time scales.”

“No, monthly data is useful and we understand that it's not necessarily a trend.”

“We use the data to look at long term trends on a monthly basis.”

“Why not just keep the monthly reports as they are. They give the most up to date picture.”

“We do not wish to see the monthly datasets dropped - they are very useful for monitoring changes over time.”

The National Farmers' Union's (NFU) response was:

“The NFU does not support the move from monthly to quarterly publication of statistics, the NFU feels monthly statistics not only allow a more regular snapshot into the progress for eradicating disease, but also allows local eradication groups timely data to help highlight any potential changes within bTB trends. The NFU has concerns that moving away from monthly data, while simultaneously experiencing some substantial policy changes to the tb eradication strategy, will leave the industry in a more vulnerable position and risks weakening the transparency and therefore trust which is crucial to an industry/government partnership approach to bTB eradication.

The NFU reiterates the importance of maintaining the monthly information, including the current statistical notices, commentary, herd incidence and prevalence measures and the detailed statistical datasets (County, TB area & Country level).”

### **bTB statisticians' Response:**

This question was a key driver for carrying out the user engagement exercise. Although there are some users that wished to maintain the current frequency of updates having consulted the three Chief Veterinary Officers of GB and the Defra Head of Profession for Statistics, we plan to discontinue the eight monthly official statistics releases published each year. Our analysis of monthly changes in the bTB statistics shows that they cannot be considered a reliable predictor of overall trends. The publication of the August 2020 bTB official statistics on 11 November 2020 will be the last of that type.

Having released statistical resource from regular monthly production we will then be able to provide an improved quarterly release. Users will be able to benefit from:

- more detailed commentary on emerging issues.
- expansion of the geographies covered by herd years at risk incidence measure.
- improved clarity on the drivers for change in the herd years at risk incidence measure as testing regimes alter.
- updates to the interactive dashboard.

There will be no loss of information as the monthly county, TB region, and country breakdowns will be continued to be published each quarter. We believe that quarterly reporting achieves the balance between the annual APHA detailed [bTB Epidemiology Reports](#) and some users' need for detailed county level statistics and analysis. We understand that there will be a period of adjustment where the quarterly National Statistics releases do not align with some users internal reporting. That is why we are providing two months' advance notice that the publication of the monthly bTB Official Statistics will cease after November 2020.

## Q9 – Dropping the old APHA England boundaries

The English regions used in the National and Official Statistical notices no longer reflect any current administrative geography in England. The county level National Statistics are published for four administrative regions of England (South West, South East, Midlands and North) previously used by APHA. We are proposing to:

- Publish English county data in three .ods datasets grouped by the TB risk areas of High Risk Area, Edge and Low Risk Area.
- Stop publishing the county data grouped in South West, South East, Midlands and North .ods files.

**Would you support this change and do you have any comments?**

There were 13 responses to this question, with more than twice as many expressing support for the change (9) than expressing opposition (4). Six respondents provided additional comment, which showed that some respondents who expressed opposition had not understood the question.

Multiple respondents opposed the change on the grounds of a need for higher granularity in the statistics datasets, perhaps misinterpreting the wording of the question to mean the publications would no longer include county-level data, despite this not being the case. One respondent highlighted the need for the new partitions to be back-dated to allow for consistent analysis. As it is merely regrouping the counties in different spreadsheets the entire series from 1996 will be retained.

“But we are concerned that it will not be possible to compare trends in the data over time. We only support this change if it will be possible for the new aggregations to be back dated.”

“County is relevant and risk area is relevant.”

“However not all parts of the areas are uniform and they vary widely so putting them all together can be unfair and not representative e.g. hotspot areas.”

“This is a long overdue and sensible change.”

“We need fine-scale data to carry out analyses.”

“I am only interested in TB stats and historical trend of each whole county.”

### **bTB statisticians' Response:**

This question was included to forewarn users of an upcoming change. Since the June 2020 National Statistics the files for [High, Edge and Low risk areas](#) of England have been published alongside the four regional files. The only loss of granularity relates to the 2018 Edge boundary change where for a period of 2 and half years we have been publishing the split between former High Risk Area and Edge parts of five counties in England. In addition the North, South West, South East and Midlands spreadsheets will be removed from the “GB by Country” dataset download.

## Q11 and Q12 – Interactive bTB statistics dashboard

**In March 2020 we launched an interactive dashboard. We are seeking feedback on this innovation. If you have used the dashboard, do you think you would benefit from an epidemiological narrative alongside the statistics?**

There were seven responses to the question, unanimously choosing “Yes”. Five respondents provided comments on the interactive dashboard, of which a selection are shown below. Most expressed support for the dashboard and for the addition of an epidemiological perspective, and a greater degree of explanatory text, but also expressed concern about its functionality.

“We don't use this a great deal as it is difficult to see differing trends over time and compare them with to areas so perhaps some sort of text may be useful.”

“Unable to get the dashboard to work so unable to comment but an epi narrative would be sensible.”

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) response supported the change:

“The NFU welcomes a more interactive method of displaying the key trends in bTB data and applauds these principles of open data. The new data dashboard allows for bTB statistics to be displayed in an innovative way, which builds alongside the data already displayed through ibTB.

The NFU has made a number of calls to further the information available to inform the bTB eradication policy. To build a true partnership approach, transparency through open data is pivotal.”

### **bTB statisticians' response:**

The [interactive dashboard](#) is based on the initial work by Dr Andy Robertson of Exeter University. Version 2 has been developed and is maintained by Defra. It contains all the information for the datasets (.ODS) files in a format that some users may prefer to access. We are aware that there are intermittent issues with the hosting software which causes the dashboard to be unavailable for short periods of time. There are planned improvements to the system that will enhance reliability.

## Q13 – Accessibility changes

New regulations place an obligation on all government websites to meet accessibility rules by 23rd September 2020. Proposals include:

- Moving from pdf to HTML releases.
- Adding Alt Text to assist with screenreading.
- Introducing machine readable .csv files alongside the .ods datasets.

**Are there accessibility requirements that are not being met?**

Four respondents provided comments in answer to this question. None of them suggested any additional accessibility requirements that weren't being met.

“We currently have no problems with pdf or ODS - so the change is not needed by us.”

“I don't really know what the above 3 things mean in practice! So long as the statistics can be downloaded and used in Excel that's fine!!”

“No. Happy with the current formats. The proposed 'accessibility' changes will represent a retrograde step in many ways and extra work for little tangible benefit.”

**bTB statisticians' Response:**

This question was included to forewarn users of a forthcoming change that is mandatory. The September National Statistics release and accompanying datasets have been published in a format that meets WCAG 2.1 guidelines.

## Free comments

The final question on the survey invited respondents to provide any additional comments that they felt were relevant and were not covered by the questions in the survey. Four respondents did so and their comments are reproduced below, along with our response.

Comment: “It is crucial to issue comparable statistics from [badger] cull areas in a very timely fashion. Currently, these data are very out of date by the time they are issued. Furthermore, I think access to anonymised herd-level data should be made available.”

Our response: The cull areas have never been included in the National Statistics and there are no plans to do so. A meaningful quarterly time series would not be possible to produce. Herd level data again is outside the scope of the National Statistics. Bespoke APHA reports of key statistical parameters of TB in cattle in all areas of England subjected to badger culling [are published online each year](#).

Comment: “Splitting the national herd into two herds, one subjected to cattle movements and the other not, and then publishing statistics for these two herds by county, region and country would be extremely informative.”



Our response: The difference between 'closed' and 'open' cattle herds would not meet the criteria for National Statistics of quality, value and trust. The idea has however been shared with the authors of the annual bTB Epidemiology reports for GB.

Comment: "Underlying datasets should be more visible online, rather than statistical notices which are one-dimensional and cannot be formatted."

Our response: The interactive dashboard provides users with a tool to further interrogate the data, and is publicised alongside the statistical releases. The possibility of .csv files would lead to easier data manipulation. The revised accessible National Statistics release contains additional signposting to the datasets.

Comment: "I believe in following numbers of cattle killed due to TB, not New Herd incidents, because if the whole country was down with TB then the New Herd Incidence would be ZERO."

Our response: We welcome hearing how users apply the statistics. The numbers of cattle slaughtered for bTB control reasons will still be included in the National Statistics commentary. Nevertheless, since cattle and other farmed animals are kept and managed in herds, flocks, etc. and bTB surveillance and control measures are largely applied at the herd/holding level, the herd incidence and prevalence and numbers of new and total bTB herd incidents (breakdowns) will remain the most relevant indicators for official statistical reporting and epidemiological analyses of bTB in GB. All these various parameters are complementary and taken together they help provide a more rounded description of the progression of the bTB epidemic as a whole.

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