

Farmer 'ownership' is key to TB control

Bill Harper, chairman of the National Beef Association's TB committee, implored farmers to take responsibility for TB control implementation, maintaining that it is making a critical difference between the two trial badger cull areas.

Mr Harper said that farmers in Somerset have shouldered responsibility for appointing and coordinating the marksmen employed. In contrast, the Gloucestershire area has not seen such a hands-on approach from those directly affected by bovine TB. Mr Harper believes this has made a significant difference in results achieved between the two areas.

Speaking at an NBA meeting in West Cornwall, Mr Harper went on to say that the farmers of West Penwith would soon face a set of difficult decisions around their localised control programme.

Mr Harper was sceptical about the short term prospects for a badger gassing programme. "Foam gas, as used to slaughter diseased chicken, offers the most practical option," advised Mr Harper. "Gassing is preferable to trapping and shooting, but to date there is no gas licensed for use with badgers, and that is five years away."

To build on the trial cull results, Mr Harper encouraged farmers to support a professional roll-out programme. It will require an experienced and professional fulltime manager. Funding such a move could cost as little as £2.50 per animal per year.

The farmers of North Cornwall are gearing-up to make their contribution to such a scheme, said Mr Harper; and he looks for a similar commitment from West Penwith.

Turning to vaccination, Mr Harper was clear that the best place to deploy stocks is in an area between the Manchester Ship Canal and the Humber, a distance of only 37 miles. Creating a 'firewall' across this short distance can maintain the free status of the north, while farmers tackle the issue from the south upwards.

West Penwith is the natural starting point for such a project, and farmers will have the support of Secretary of State, Owen Patterson. Jointly working with government and Natural England, farmers can get on top of the scourge of bovine TB, concluded Mr Harper.

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Notes to Editors: