

St David's Farm Newsletter

August 2008



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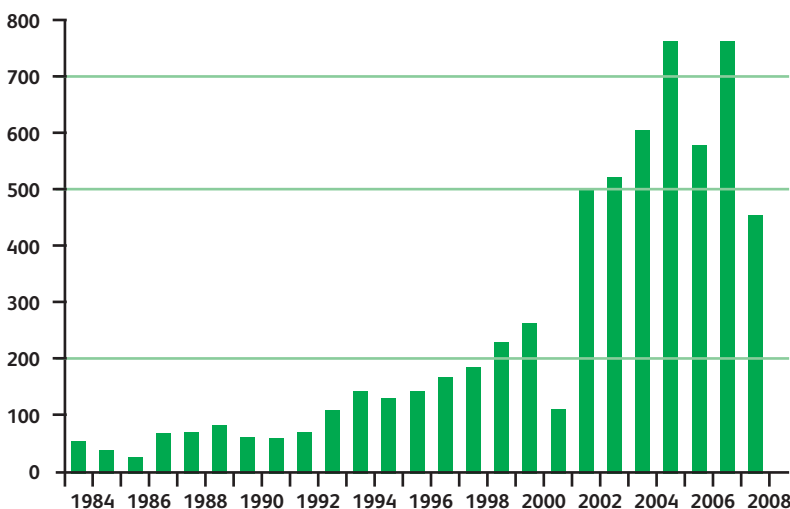
Tuberculosis

Waiting years to make an announcement that we will have to wait for years for anything to be done. Hilary Benn's announcement that the government will not grant licenses to control Tb in badgers has disappointed everyone.

They have delayed so long that any cull would now have to be so extensive that it seems unlikely that any government will sanction it, now or in the future.

The latest statistics for the start of 2008 in Devon show that there were 883 incidences of TB from January to April – that is out of 5418 herds. In other words 16.3% of herds in Devon had a reactor/inconclusive in the first four months of 2008 only. One fifth of Devon's herds are restricted at any one time, but since there is much more chance that bigger herds are affected this figure is misleading, for commercial herds in our experience the figure would be nearer 50%.

As if we need a graph to prove it but here it is:



The government says cattle controls are sufficient but only 15% of herd breakdowns are attributed to cattle movements. We need to lower this figure but clearly it is only a fraction of the problem. The badger is the ideal host animal for Tb and the UK badgers are endemically infected (most studies show a 20-25% Tb infection rate in badgers), with cattle herd infections positively related to badger sett density. Badgers have increased in numbers hugely – up 70% between 1988 and 1997 and probably equally so since then. The population is most dense in the South West with only Ireland having a greater badger density (and a bad Tb problem). Large populations not only make more badgers available to spread Tb to cattle, but also force badgers to spread and feed elsewhere, e.g. farm buildings.

Small increases in numbers therefore can make a big difference to disease prevalence. Infected badgers are not removed, so as they become weaker and shed more bacteria increasingly visit farm buildings for the easy food. In contrast infected cattle are removed by testing and slaughter, mostly before they ever have a chance to become infectious to other cattle.

With the undeniable science, it is disappointing that lobbying by the NFU, NBA along with the Veterinary organisations has been ignored in favour of the less well informed. We have been doing our part in writing to government ministers with little response. Hugo Swire MP for East Devon has met with us and supports the campaign, indeed he has pledged to raise a parliamentary debate in September on the subject where we will provide him with the Devon statistics and the real science to present to Parliament. However it is difficult to be optimistic about this when all other efforts have failed, and opinion means more than fact. The NFU continue to campaign and pursue legal challenges to the governments position, so lets hope they get some results. Various organisations have discussed strikes from testing, and this may get the governments attention, but is a risky strategy because testing and reactor removal is the only thing keeping any control on the disease at present. In the graph above the large increase in levels in 2002 after the break in testing caused by foot and mouth in 2001 highlights the danger of any lengthy break in testing.

It is hard to swallow that the farming industry should have to do even more to control this disease but nobody else is going to so we must. With recent advances in understanding about TB in cattle and badgers we should be able to better prevent the badgers from infecting cattle. It is sad that the government will not help us, but the future looks like a case of doing it ourselves. Perhaps we need to start viewing it more like the other diseases we work hard to prevent without government involvement. The following article in this months newsletter explores some of the things that could be done on your farm to lower the risk of TB breakdown.

Jeremy Hamilton – 07843288610

Tb biosecurity measures

Tb is spread from two main sources – infected cattle and wildlife (mostly badgers but occasionally deer). Therefore if we are to stop Tb spreading we must look at preventing these two routes.



There are many recommendations here, some more difficult to achieve than others and obviously everyone cannot achieve them all, but doing what you can may well help protect your cattle.

Cattle to cattle spread

Bought in cattle

15% of new breakdowns are from bought in cattle and this is too high. It is vital to be sure of the Tb situation on the farm where the animals are coming from. If your farm has no Tb then buying it in with the potential of infecting local wildlife would be a disaster, and keeping a closed herd is the ideal. Premovement testing has reduced this spread somewhat but animals can be infected six weeks before they respond to the skin test so it is not fool proof.

Therefore ideally buy from farms with no Tb history, although this is getting more and more difficult. Younger animals pose less risk, and isolating and re-testing bought in animals (combined

with other disease surveillance/vaccination) could prove very beneficial in the long run. Statistics show bulls pose a higher than average risk of bringing in Tb.

Spread in herd

If your herd is infected with Tb then limiting spread between animals may help you get clear. Isolating reactors and IR's is very important. In the winter infection can spread rapidly from a reactor to other animals housed with it. Ensuring good ventilation with reasonable stocking densities will help reduce spread since Tb is mostly a respiratory disease in cattle. Also implicated in outbreaks is BVD acting as an immune suppressant so have this disease under control. In the grazing season be aware that slurry can spread infection. Once stored for six months it should be safe. Slurry/manure from sheds with reactor cattle should not be spread on grazing land to be grazed that season, and it is noted that this could also infect badgers. Injection is better than spraying and creating aerosol, but if spraying at least keep cattle upwind!

Between herds

If you are clear and your neighbour is not then keep your cattle separate, 25% of new infections spread this way, although some of this is by badgers. Double fencing is the ideal yet expensive and impractical, but consider making use of the hedged fields or anywhere that prevents direct nose to nose contact.

Badger to cattle spread

Farm buildings

Badgers are opportunistic and come to farms for easy food, especially when the ground is hard so worms are difficult to get, or when they are diseased and ostracised from the sett. They prefer barley and cattle concentrate, then

maize silage followed by molassed meals and feed blocks. Studies setting up CCTV in farm yards at night found badger activity on nearly all of them, even when farmers thought there was none. They will defecate and urinate to territory mark food sources which could well be your meal store! Therefore every effort should be taken to limit them coming into contact with cattle or cattle food. Keep things really tidy, close everything up at night and make sure doors are badger proof to all stock housing possible – there have been outbreaks in calves associated with badgers coming in to calf sheds to feed from calf buckets. Make it difficult for badgers to find anything worth coming into the yard for. If you see 'strange' behaviour for example a badger out in the daytime or living around farm buildings then this is a sign that that badger is diseased possibly with Tb and so should be removed from your farm. Remove any dead badgers you find promptly.

Silage

Silage especially maize is attractive to badgers and statistically a big risk factor for Tb in cattle. Keep the silage clamp face clean and close it up again and put electric netting across it when not in use, this would make a big difference on many farms. Big bale silage is more protected from badgers and hay is less appealing to them so both of these feeds have been shown to be associated with less chance of a Tb outbreak and could perhaps be used more in dry/youngstock?



When not in use, re-close the cover and use electric flexi-netting to prevent badgers feeding at the silage clamp face

Troughs

Using netting/fencing to keep badgers out of cow shed troughs (especially TMR) will not be very easy for most farms but would be very worthwhile. Badgers will be climbing into these to feed and defecating and urinating as they go. At grass do not feed cattle off the ground, use troughs at least 80cm high and clean them out often. Mineral buckets should be raised/suspended also.

Grazing

Consider fencing off badger setts, latrines or areas of obvious activity. Here is where cattle will sniff at faeces/urine contaminated soil and become infected. Boundaries or places where badgers cross fences etc are where they territory mark and therefore sources of infection so if possible close holes up and limit access by cattle to what you can.

Jeremy Hamilton – 07843288610



Try to prevent badger access to the troughs, especially TMR. Hay (as shown above) is much less attractive and so safer

Maize silage 2008

It may seem a little early to be talking about maize silage for this year yet. Especially so as some crops are well behind others – in some cases as a result of re-drilling due to bird damage/obliteration!

Another challenging maize growing year so far for many then but I'm thinking a little further ahead towards harvest.

Biggest sin of all, seen year on year, is the all too eager harvesting of the plant! Many growers appear intent on judging harvest stage by the cob only, without consideration of plant condition. So what? Well, with varieties seemingly unstoppably becoming ever-more "stay green," waiting for the plant to die off is more important than ever before to achieve optimum dry matter.

The crude protein and the digestibility value of crops and resultant ME are driven up (obviously) by greener, more digestible plant material. So earlier cut equals more energy. This seems a good thing though right? After all, we nutritionists are always banging on



about energy all the time. The problem with considering this in isolation is that, whilst theoretically a better analysis is realised, greener, wetter plant material produces a much more acidic fermentation, increasing production of lactic acid. Lactic is a strong acid and as such drops the pH heavily in the clamp. Some low dry matter crops will drop down as low as 3.5pH! Whilst crops can be starchy enough, (i.e. the cob was ripe) the greenness of the plant can create a really threatening problem – namely acidosis. Some very green plants harvested too early will have very low dry matter, very high ME (which seems good) but excruciating acid loads,

meaning feed out mightn't be as good as first expected from a paper analysis.

Feeding such acidic material is at odds with everything we are trying to achieve with high yielding healthy cows. Intake of very acidic forage, such as prematurely cut maize silage means a real struggle to create the optimal rumen environment of pH 6.5. It also very heavily restricts the type and levels of concentrate intake consumable, thus massively restricting potential milk output.

With cereal prices falling, there shouldn't be the same drive to harvest maize crops early to get wheat in the ground like there was last year which should help ease the situation. I appreciate that in some areas soil conditions are a concern in terms of getting on the ground to retrieve the crop. But please have in your head plant condition, going by the cob alone isn't enough. Bear in mind that moisture in the clamp will be absorbed by what seem like very hard maize grains on the cob. Provided grains are cracked, by feed out moisture absorption means digestion shouldn't be a problem. End of lecture.

Charlie King, Three Counties Feeds – 07917 203790

Raw material update

Soya – Good news the Argentine strike seems to be closing to an end with a new agreement drawn up between farmers and the government, supplies of Soya into the market place has instantly taken heat out of a very bullish market.

Together with lower oil prices we have seen over £20 p/t off in the last week. It is very difficult to predict how the Soya price will react in the near future, will £240p/t for the winter be achievable or will the likely crude oil increases prevent this from happening.

Soya Hulls – As mentioned last month, butterfat's were struggling this summer due to lush wet grazing on offer. Hulls have been a useful tool in aiding these problems on farm where no buffer was available. Forward winter prices of £153p/t is looking relatively attractive but with a bigger Sugar Beet harvest due this year and low priced grain there could still be room for a decrease.

Raw material prices

	May 08	June 08	July 08
Hipro Soya	£290	£299	£280
Argy Soya	£280	£283	£278
Sugar Beet	£185	£187	£187
Soya Hulls	£163	£169	£167
Rapeseed Meal	£195	£191	£182
Wheat	£158	£142	£132
Barley	£149	£134	£127

Sugar Beet – With a larger beet crop this year, also more later cut grass silage and combined with cheaper cereals. I was surprised at Sugar beet being offered this winter at around £180p/t, I would think farmers would maximise cereals into their diets because of the already high fibre levels.

Wheat and Barley – Cereal prices have continued to weaken, with the likely hood of a record crop. As I write this article the weather looks to be improving, with new crop Barley already coming off the field with very good bushel weights. Harvest price for wheat of around £115p/t with barley expected to be £5p/t less.

Molasses – Suppliers are tightening up on molasses contracts this winter to help with deliveries, there is no doubt prices will increase for the winter by end of August and high protein mixes will be popular again.

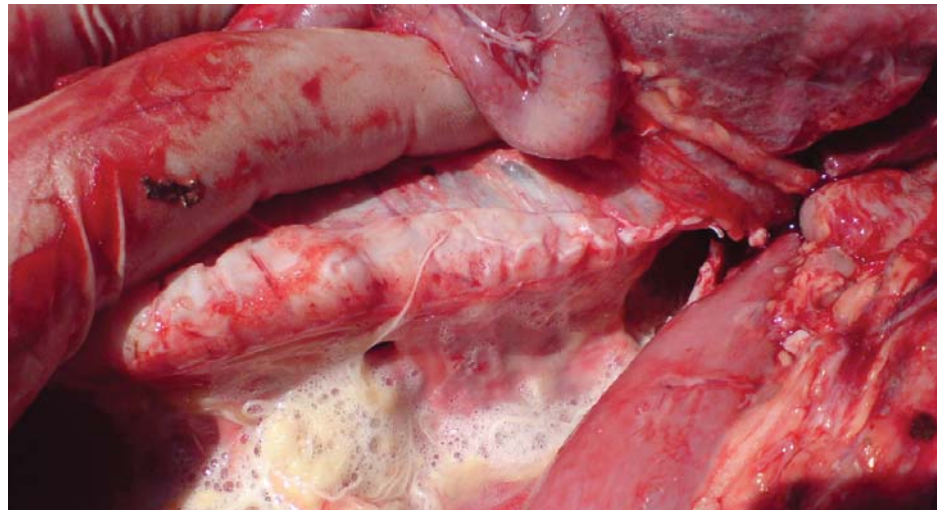
Rapeseed Meal – With Soya prices dropping the Rape market had to become bearish with the best part of £10 p/t decrease over the last few days, I suggest keep a careful eye on the market further reductions are likely.

Steve Symons – 01884 256256
(Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays)

Lungworm warning

A wet July has made conditions suitable for lungworm outbreaks with a rise in cases already seen.

Although primarily a disease of calves recent years have seen an increase in incidences in mature cattle where they have not the required immunity. Make sure cattle are wormed to prevent losses. If you have doubts about the worm burdens your animals may be carrying speak to one of the vets about worm faecal egg counts.



Post mortem showing threadlike lungworms in the trachea

STOP PRESS: Don't forget the St David's Farm Practice BBQ's on **Tuesday 5th and 12th August**. Come along for a chat, some food and (hopefully) a bit of sunshine. Please contact Jayne on **01392 872934** for more details and to reserve your place.