RSPCA Factsheet

Badger campaign – get your facts right!

What is bovine TB?

- Bovine TB is a strain of tuberculosis (a bacterial disease usually affecting the lungs) which can be transmitted between cattle and other animals, including humans.

Why is it important?

- Bovine TB affects the ability of farmers to sell their animals
- Testing for the disease and compensating farmers for any infected cattle that have been culled costs the taxpayer a lot of money each year
- Bovine TB used to be a human health risk before the introduction of cattle testing and the treatment of cows' milk to protect consumers

Is bovine TB in cattle a serious animal welfare issue?

- Although bovine TB is serious if it fully develops, it is very rare to see clinical symptoms in cattle in the UK because infected animals are identified through routine testing and culled long before they show any symptoms.
- Problems such as mastitis and lameness in cattle are much bigger welfare issues, resulting in greater suffering in much larger numbers of cattle.

Do badgers spread bovine TB to cattle?

- Cattle-to-cattle spread is much more significant
- Although there is some link with badgers, the link is not clear
- An analysis of badgers killed in road accidents over seven counties in three years showed that, even in those parts of the country worst affected by bovine TB, most badgers tested negative for the disease
- Both badgers and cattle can carry bovine TB (as can approximately 20 other wildlife species, including deer).

Is bovine TB a serious welfare issue in badgers?

- The evidence is that most badgers are free from the disease. The results from a recent trial found 88 per cent of the badgers that had been culled had no bovine TB.
- Even infected badgers often show no clinical signs of bovine TB and they may live normal lives and breed - they may never have any symptoms of bovine TB.
- In the few badgers that do have symptoms, they are wheeziness and loss of weight and condition. There may be some skin ulceration.

So how do cattle get bovine TB?

- The disease spreads mainly from cattle to other cattle.
- A report published by the Science Advisory Council in September 2005 concluded that the movement of cattle around the country increased the incidence of bovine TB.

What can be done to halt the spread of bovine TB in cattle?

- Testing of cattle for bovine TB before **and** after they are moved around the country (the government is introducing pre-movement testing of some cattle on 20 February)
- Less movement of cattle around the country – the RSPCA has been calling for this for many years
- Quarantining new stock brought on to farms.

> page 2

What is the Government consultation about?

- Whether badgers should be culled.
- Whether farmers should be licensed to cull badgers.
- What method of killing should be used if culling goes ahead.

What methods of capturing and/or killing is the government considering in its consultation?

- Gassing badgers using carbon monoxide.
- Shooting of free-running badgers.
- Snaring using body snares. There is very little information about this type of snare but at least 40 per cent of animals caught in neck snares are not the intended targets, plus snared animals may suffer terrible injuries as a result of trying to escape)

Is there sound scientific evidence to support a badger cull?

- The government set up an eight-year trial to study the impact of badger culling on the incidence of bovine TB in cattle.
- The recently published results showed that badger culling actually increases TB infection in cattle in surrounding areas and achieves only a limited reduction within the areas targeted.
- The chairman of the Independent Scientific Group responsible for overseeing the culling trials has warned that the government ignored the scientific advice provided and misinterpreted the results of the trials. He has stated that a badger cull will almost certainly make the situation worse and that it would be better to focus on cattle controls.

Why not simply kill the very few badgers that are infected with bovine TB?

- There is no reliable test for TB in live badgers. The only reliable way of identifying bovine TB in badgers is by testing the badgers' dead bodies. This means killing badgers to test them for infection - a very extreme measure if they are not infected after all - especially as most badgers don't have bovine TB.

If badgers are a protected species, how can they be legally killed?

- Although they are protected under UK law (e.g. the Protection of Badgers Act 1992), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has the power to issue licences for killing badgers in certain circumstances**.**