Contingency planning for bTB

What are the risks?

It is important to think through in advance how you could best manage your herd in a bTB breakdown situation, so that the overall impact can be minimised. The actions that may be taken will vary from one herd to another, so it's important to have plans in place that will suit your farm business. Some herds will be at a known higher risk than others, for example:

- herds with a bTB breakdown history
- herds in areas of high risk where there have been and are current breakdowns
- herds that purchase regularly and from multiple sources.

In all cases the severity of the breakdown may vary.

What impacts would follow the identification of bTB reactors?

The finding of bTB reactors at the reading of a TB test or following the detection of a Lesion at Routine Slaughter (LRS) can come as an unexpected finding and will have immediate consequences:

1. Movement restrictions (no live sales and possibly no purchases)
2. Loss of stock
3. Financial loss: loss of income from live animal sales and / or milk sales
4. Extra TB testing
5. Human impact.

1. Movement restrictions

Impacts

- Herds with bTB disclosed are restricted from **outward movements**, except under licence and to direct slaughter.
- Restrictions will also be imposed if an LRS is found, or if a herd test becomes 'overdue'.
- Animals may have a TB status against them on DAERA's Animal Information System if they are reactors, inconclusive reactors, have missed a test or have been traced from another breakdown herd. They can only move out of the herd (including to slaughter) under licence.
- Movement restrictions can have major consequences in some herds, primarily due to the build-up of baby calves, weaned calves, store cattle and in-calf replacement heifers.
- **Inward movements** to the herd may be restricted if a herd test is overdue or if your herd is classified as a Severe TB breakdown.

The consequences can include:

- Implications of carrying extra stock (space and labour requirements), animal health and welfare, financial perspectives, slurry storage and environmental impact (increased nitrate and phosphorus loading)
- Potential overloading of houses, with associated animal health implications
- Need for additional feed and bedding
- Loss of market value – delayed or lost sales of breeding stock
- Delayed purchase of replacement breeding stock

- Delayed purchase of stores for finishing
- Delayed sales of finished stock (disruption of usual trading channels)
- Lost milk sales.

What actions could be taken to reduce the impacts?

Options to deal with the impacts of movement restrictions are to:

- ❖ Sell calves (first) and other stock (cull cows last) following a negative test, especially before the winter (when housing and feed pressures would be at a maximum).
- ❖ If heifer-rearing is carried out on a different unit, try to ensure that it is not in a TB high risk area, that your heifers are not mixing with other higher risk heifers and that the rearer is taking steps to reduce the risk of bTB.
- ❖ Think through other options for managing heifers if they cannot move home before calving.
- ❖ For beef cattle, Approved Finishing Units can be helpful, providing a route for the pressures of over-stocking, financial pressures and animal welfare issues to be reduced.

Planning in order to manage a build-up of livestock

- ❖ Consult your private vet about how to manage youngstock; have a specific herd health plan for the management of this group of animals.
- ❖ If you are putting up new buildings to house excess youngstock, can the buildings be badger-proofed?
- ❖ All farms should have the ability to isolate animals effectively.
- ❖ If you consider your farm to be at high risk, can additional feed and bedding be purchased and stored in advance of the winter season?
- ❖ Have you sufficient labour? Could you source some additional relief help for TB testing and stock management?
- ❖ If you need to take conacre to assist with forage production and meeting nitrates requirements, are there wildlife implications to be considered (eg the presence of badger setts)?

2. Loss of stock

Impacts

- Fewer breeding females
- Fewer milking cows
- Loss of future replacements
- Loss of genetics
- Loss of breeding bulls

What actions could be taken to reduce the impacts?

When purchasing replacements, source cattle from herds that have not been restricted in recent years. Check that the cattle have been TB tested recently, as cattle that have been exposed to bTB recently could introduce TB to your herd.

- ❖ How can you identify low-risk herds from which to purchase replacements or stock to rear?
- ❖ If bTB was identified in milking cows or heifers, where could you source additional heifers?

- ❖ Can you use sexed semen so that you have a choice of retaining your homebred heifers? Breeding your own replacements will reduce the risk of buying in disease.
- ❖ Can you plan a breeding programme for replacements?
- ❖ Would you consider working towards running a closed herd?
- ❖ In the event of a breakdown, would use or increased use of AI be an option in your herd?

3. Financial implications: loss of income from live animal sales and milk sales Impacts

Compensation covers direct economic losses due to the loss of cattle, but not consequential losses. Depending on the size and type of farm and timing of the breakdown, all farms with bTB incur costs however some will experience a much greater cost / loss. Cash flow forecasting is needed so that budgeting and expenditure can be planned, however loss of income leads to uncertainty, cash flow issues and loss of business control, in both dairy and suckler herds. There can also be a long-term effect on a business through lost genetics, for example affecting future bonus payments for milk quality.

Costs can be broken down into several categories:

Testing	Gathering stock/ staffing costs Impact on Daily Live Weight Gain and milk yield Knock on delays on other farm work
Isolating animals	Farm labour – handling, milking reactors separately Housing, bedding Biosecurity
Culling of TB reactors	Loss of milk, loss of sales Loss of genetics Limited use of high-risk slurry
Cleansing & Disinfection	Labour, including inspection time Materials
Restocking	Time to source and view stock Haulage Stress impacts of transit Increased biosecurity
Movement restrictions	Additional feed, housing and bedding Loss of market value – delayed or lost sales of breeding stock Delayed purchase of replacement breeding stock / stores for finishing / finished stock (disruption of usual trading channels) Lost milk sales
Other costs	Ongoing interest payments/ debt maintenance Delay in plans to develop business or reinvest

What actions could be taken to reduce the impacts?

- Examine your budget for the year, ie income and expenditure.
- Update your monthly cash flow as circumstances change.
- Forecast the future cash flow on the farm.
- Discuss cashflow issues with your feed rep (as feed bills are likely to be your biggest extra cost), your agricultural advisor and bank manager.

It could be helpful to think through the following questions.

Testing

- Can you source extra help when needed?
- Can you get the test booked well in advance to help planning of your other activities?

Isolating animals

- Have you a dedicated isolation facility, ideally in a separate airspace from other cattle?
- How could you ensure excellent hygiene when working with high risk cattle?

Culling of TB reactors

- Does your current farm insurance policy cover consequential losses (eg decreased income if milk production falls, or if replacements can't be sourced) following a TB breakdown?
- Can or should your farm carry more stock as insurance against loss?
- How long could slurry be stored before spreading (ideally at least 6 months) and what ground could you spread high risk slurry on to reduce risks (eg silage ground)?

Cleansing & Disinfection

- Could you outsource Cleansing and Disinfection to a contractor?

Restocking

- How much would a smaller herd (if no replacement purchases were allowed in the short term) affect production? How would payment of your existing loans be impacted?

Discuss with your vet management of new stock when they arrive on the farm, in terms of isolation and vaccination.

Movement restrictions

- In exceptional circumstances, have you asked DAERA to issue a licence to allow movement of cattle to another OTW (Officially TB free status Withdrawn) herd? A risk assessment will have to be carried out by DAERA staff.
- Could you afford extra feeding to rear and finish cattle?
- Would you need to adapt or build additional accommodation to house additional stock?
- How will you manage slurry storage and meet nitrates requirements?

Taking action to improve farm biosecurity and reduce the risks of an outbreak will have benefits that should outweigh the costs:

- ✓ Locate badger setts and latrines on your farm, fence them off to reduce the risk of cattle ingesting *M bovis.*
- ✓ Act to badger-proof water and feed troughs and licks.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect any shared equipment before and after use.
- ✓ Maintain boundary fences.
- ✓ Carry out a biosecurity assessment with your vet.

4. Extra TB testing

Impacts

Extra testing requires increased labour and time, and places additional stress on animals. It results from several TB scenarios:

- Following an initial breakdown
- As a result of a lesion being detected at post-mortem in an abattoir
- As a result of being contiguous to a breakdown
- As a result of backward tracing (after TB is found in an animal tested on another farm).

What actions could be taken to reduce the impacts?

- ❖ Choose bulls with greater genetic resistance for TB, based on the health traits sub-index of the EBI. This could reduce the number of cattle that become infected.
- ❖ Cull inconclusive cattle at the end of lactation/ before breeding again
- ❖ Cull cattle that had any bovine reactions at the TB test (ie below the inconclusive cut-off)
- ❖ Are there older cattle that could be culled, that are from the same group as reactors?
- ❖ Ensure good quality testing facilities and assistance are available for TB tests to ensure the test is carried out efficiently.
- ❖ Arrange for extra help in advance of testing.

Dealing with other susceptible species at the same locations

Other species are susceptible to bTB, including camelids, goats, deer, sheep and pigs, and are subject to statutory controls, so testing of them may have to be carried out.

- ❖ Keep and manage these species separately from cattle to reduce the risk of spread of disease.

5. Human impact

Impact

Dealing with bovine TB in your herd can be very stressful, financially, physically and emotionally, on the whole family. There are increased Health and Safety risks due to increased occasions when there will be physical danger as a result of moving excited animals.

What actions could be taken to reduce the impacts?

The following groups may assist in your preparation for and response to a TB outbreak:

- Your CAFRE advisor
- Your private vet

- Your agricultural bank manager
- Your animal feed company.
- DAERA | Email: daera.helpline@daera-ni.gov.uk | Phone: 0300 200 7840
- **Rural Support | Phone: 0800 138 1678**
  Rural Support provides impartial guidance for farmers and farm family members in support of their farm business and personal wellbeing.

In summary

- Develop a contingency plan for dealing with bovine TB with your vet - plan for the 'worst case'.
- Think through how to minimise the specific risks of TB restrictions on your farm business.
- Consider short and long term actions – start today.