TB ADVISORY GROUP’S VIEWS AND COMMENTS ON THE HUSBANDRY WORKING GROUP’S ADVICE ON HUSBANDRY BEST PRACTICE

Background

1. The Chairman of the TB Advisory Group was appointed by Ministers in July 2006. Members were then appointed and the Group was established in October 2006. One of the roles of the Group is to respond to requests for advice on development and implementation of bovine TB control policies in England. The Group also has responsibility for working with interested organisations and promoting a shared understanding. Although the Group is tasked with looking at policies in England, the Group is also working to build links with the England Implementation Group, the Wales TB Action Group and interested parties in Scotland.

Scope of advice requested

2. In response to a request from Defra, this report sets out the Group's views and comments on Defra's Husbandry Working Group's advice on husbandry best practice. The Group was asked to advise on options for creating demand and encouraging uptake of the husbandry advice amongst farmers (particularly in high incidence areas but also in areas where bTB is not common). The Group was also asked for its views on methods of dissemination of the husbandry advice.

3. It is important to note that the husbandry advice is not the TB Advisory Group's advice. It was produced and finalized by the Husbandry Working Group which comprises representatives from a range of stakeholder organisations including farming, veterinary and wildlife interests and representatives from Wales. Representatives of the Husbandry Working Group will also be promoting the advice within their own organisations.

Summary

4. On the whole, the Group thought the husbandry advice was very useful in offering practical best practice measures to help to reduce the risk of disease spread.

5. The Group has been asked to offer views and comments on creating demand and encouraging uptake of the husbandry advice amongst farmers and has made a number of recommendations on the presentation and communication of the advice. The Group has separately made recommendations on good cattle husbandry practice in their advice to Defra Ministers and the Chief Veterinary Officer on pre-movement testing.

Consideration

6. The Group felt it was important that the Husbandry Working Group had worked through available research findings and previous studies so that
farmers could have confidence in the advice. They were concerned that farmers would be less likely to follow the advice if it was then contradicted by findings from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG). The Group advised that the Husbandry Working Group’s advice needs to be consistent with the ISG’s final report due later this year. The Group therefore recommends that before publication the husbandry advice is sent to the ISG for their views and to confirm there is nothing in the advice that would be contradicted by the ISG at a later date.

7. The Group suggested the order of topics in the advice should be reviewed to avoid giving prominence to badger management over cattle husbandry best practice. The Group felt that the general herd health protection lines should be at the beginning and that the badger preventative measures come last. Defra explained that the advice, as presented to the Group, was the substance and that there were various ways that different components could be communicated. The Group recognised the strength of feeling around a badger cull. In the absence of any announcement from Ministers on a badger culling policy the Group felt that the advice could be inflammatory if the main message in this advice was for farmers to deal with badgers on farm to prevent disease spread. Defra explained that biosecurity / best practice is important whether or not there is an announcement about a badger cull and whatever a decision may be.

8. The Group recommends that the timing of when the Husbandry Working Group’s advice is communicated to farmers is carefully considered. Farmers would not be considering housing alterations at this time of year when cattle are put out to grass. It would be better to promote the advice in the autumn when farmers were considering improvements to their buildings.

Creating demand and encouraging uptake

9. The Group considered how to create demand and encourage farmer buy-in to the husbandry advice. The Group recommends that the consequences and impact of a TB breakdown should be included in communicating the advice particularly for those farmers in low incidence areas. This would give farmers a better understanding of the costs to their businesses and an incentive to follow some of these practical husbandry measures to avoid those costs.

10. The Group considered how private vets could be incentivised to use and promote the advice with their clients. The Group recommends that if the costs and benefits, particularly to those in 1 and 2 yearly testing areas or farms suffering a TB breakdown, are set out as clearly and persuasively as possible, vets would then be able to promote its value with their clients.

Dissemination of husbandry advice

11. The Group understands that the Husbandry Working Group’s advice has been published on Defra’s website. However, the Group felt that not all farmers would rely on Defra’s website for information. The Group considered
how best the husbandry advice could be further communicated to farmers and felt it would be best communicated face to face with farmers. The Group agreed with the Husbandry Working Group that local vets could encourage uptake and raise awareness of the advice. The Group recommends that Defra continues to work with the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) and also approach the British Veterinary Association (BVA) to promote the Husbandry Working Group’s advice.

12. To build on this working relationship, the Group also recommends that articles to promote the advice could be placed in the Veterinary Record and other veterinary press, to raise awareness with vets directly.

Future review

13. The Group understands the Husbandry Working Group’s advice is designed to be a living document and reviewed and updated regularly. As part of this process, the TB Advisory Group agrees with the Husbandry Working Group that the husbandry advice should be reviewed in light of research findings and information becoming available from feedback from interested organisations. The TB Advisory Group will offer further views on updating the advice as they receive feedback and as necessary.

TB Advisory Group
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