

NEWS RELEASE

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VETS ISSUE NEW POLICY PAPERS

ON

TB AND BRUCELLOSIS ERADICATION PROGRAMMES

TB eradication schemes have dramatically reduced the incidence of TB in cattle from original infection levels of 80% of cattle herds and 17% of animals to its current level of about one half of one per cent of all animals. More than 13% of herds were infected with Brucellosis when a national eradication scheme was launched in the mid-1960s. The current levels are also only a fraction of one per cent with significant reduction achieved in recent years. The importance of containing, and improving on these disease levels, are considerable in terms of trade, animal health and public health.

These are the views of Veterinary Ireland, as enunciated by its key Animal Health Committee, in important new policy papers on the Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis Eradication Programmes launched today (16 September 2002).

The policy documents outline the obstacles which are preventing the current TB programme from delivering eradication of TB in cattle. While it can achieve containment of the disease at its current level, the endemic high levels of TB in wildlife, particularly badgers, is seen as the most significant barrier to TB eradication in Ireland.

“The increasing scientific and epidemiological evidence is that the high level of TB infection in wildlife is the single biggest obstacle to progress towards eradication of TB in cattle in Ireland,” according to Committee Chairperson Michael Sheahan. “We support the current research and other work which is attempting to find both interim and long-term solutions to this problem”, he said.

“It is important to accept that eradication of TB in cattle in Ireland is not imminent”, according to the policy document, “but the current programme is effective in containing the disease at its current relatively low levels”.

The Brucellosis programme has resulted in significant improvements in the incidence of this disease in the national herd over the last three years in particular. Veterinary Ireland believes that final eradication can be achieved if the control measures which are now in place are maintained

until the finishing line has been crossed. “We have previously seen the adverse consequences of relaxing controls too quickly when the end is in sight”, according to Mr. Sheahan.

“Comprehensive herd health management programmes tailored to individual farms, could yield significant benefits in terms of animal health, public health, and animal welfare”, according to Veterinary Ireland President, Sean O’Laoide. “There could be significant benefits in relation to the prevention, control and management of TB and Brucellosis at farm level if considered in this broader context”, he said.

Such programmes involve taking a holistic approach to all matters directly or indirectly impacting on the health status of the herd and focus on areas such as preventive medicine, nutrition, infertility, infectious disease control, mastitis control, biosecurity and so on. They could interestingly, encompass existing schemes such as dairy hygiene and quality assurance schemes.

In conclusion Mr. O’Laoide said that “Veterinary Ireland supports the increasing North-South cooperation in relation to animal health issues generally and considers that TB control and Brucellosis eradication lend themselves extremely well to an all-island approach. These new policy papers are being offered by Veterinary Ireland as a positive contribution to the important work of controlling and eliminating these two diseases on all Irish farms”, he said.