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## VIEWPOINT

# The cattle TB crisis – a radical rethink

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Cattle tuberculosis in Great Britain is out of control, rising at some 18% a year, but there is great confusion as to why cattle control measures are not working (Hancox 2004*a*). Culling over 10 000 badgers so far in the Krebs Randomised Badger Culling Trial has had no effect, despite repeated calls for mass culls by farmers and vets (Hancox 2004*b*). Badgers are blamed for this crisis because it is claimed cattle-to-cattle transmission is unimportant, and badgers with TB are found after repeat breakdowns in herds supposedly free of TB after negative tests.

It is quite astonishing that these views persist. The crux of successful TB eradication in Great Britain into the 1970s was annual testing which permitted

removal of TB cattle before they reached the more infectious stage with visible lung lesions (VL). Slippage in test intervals has simply allowed more cases to reach the VL stage with resultant wildfire spread. Furthermore, failure to ban movement of untested cattle has allowed TB to spread to areas TB-free for 50 years. In addition, the real reason for the repeat breakdowns is that the skin test is only 80% accurate, such that 'missed' TB cases remain in the herd. Such false negative anergy cases may be early latent incubators, active spreader late TB anergy cases and lactating cows with post-parturient immunosuppression (Hancox 2003; Radostits *et al.* 1994). Regaining control of cattle TB will necessitate re-discovery of these facts.

## REFERENCES

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