Bovine TB control strategy for England

As recommended by the Steering Group of the Bovine TB Partnership for England



Co-design and authorship

This document has been developed through a co-design process led by the Steering Group of the Bovine TB Partnership for England, which includes APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency), BCVA (British Cattle Veterinary Association), BVA (British Veterinary Association), Defra (Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs), and the NFU (National Farmers' Union), alongside individual members from the University of Cambridge, the Zoological Society of London, and private farms. It reflects a shared commitment to accelerating progress towards TB freedom by 2038.

Steering Group members are named below in their individual and professional capacities.

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Executive summary

This recommended strategy sets out a clear, practical plan to achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free status in England by 2038. It focuses on what will make the biggest difference on farm: reducing TB in cattle, reducing the risk of spread between herds, and giving farmers and vets better tools and information to stay ahead of the disease. It is grounded in science, but designed to work in the real world.

What this recommended strategy is aiming to do

The aim is straightforward: bring TB in cattle down year after year, until England reaches Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038. That means fewer breakdowns, fewer restrictions, and healthier herds.

This strategy does not rely on one solution. It sets out a joined-up approach that builds on what already works, makes better use of existing tools, introduces new ones where they make the most difference, and enables the system to respond more quickly and effectively on the ground.

Why change is needed now

Progress has been made, but bovine TB is still one of the biggest problems facing cattle farming. Too many herds are still suffering breakdowns, and the system does not always respond quickly enough or target effort where it makes the most difference.

A key issue is that some infection is missed or detected too late, allowing bovine TB to spread within and between herds. The current system can also feel slow, complex and hard to navigate.

To reach Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038, we need a step change in pace, clearer direction, and shared ownership between government, farmers, vets and industry. Doing more of the same will not be enough.

Headline: cattle vaccination

A major new tool is coming.

- The ambition is to deploy a cattle TB vaccine, alongside an approved Detect Infected Among Vaccinated Animals (DIVA) test, by 2030.
- This would help protect cattle, reduce the spread of disease, and accelerate progress towards Officially Bovine TB-Free status.

Vaccination matters because it helps reduce transmission between cattle. Used alongside testing and movement controls, it has the potential to significantly reduce the spread of bovine TB.

To make this work, testing and delivery systems will need to adapt. That includes making sure the DIVA test can be used alongside vaccination, so vaccinated cattle can still be tested and traded without disrupting markets, and that both fit into day-to-day farming in a practical way.

The overall approach

The recommended strategy takes a clear and balanced approach:

- Keep the focus on cattle – most bovine TB spreads between cattle, so this is where effort has the greatest impact.
- Act beyond cattle where it matters – use proportionate, science-informed action to manage other farmed species and wildlife where they pose a clear risk to cattle.
- Learn by doing – trial new approaches, run pilots, and scale up what works.

This means focusing on practical actions that reduce risk on farm, targeting effort where it makes the most difference, and staying flexible as new evidence and experience come in.

What success looks like

Success will be clear and measurable:

- Bovine TB in cattle falls year after year and stays low.
- England achieves Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038.
- The system is more responsive, evidence-led and trusted, continuing to use science and data to guide decisions.

In practical terms, success means fewer breakdowns, quicker resolution when bovine TB is found, and greater confidence in how the system works.

The main areas of action

The recommended strategy focuses effort in three areas:

Stronger cattle-focused control

- More effective use of testing and earlier detection of infection.
- Clear and accessible herd risk information to support safer trading decisions.
- Stronger management of cattle with a higher likelihood of infection.
- Improved biosecurity and on farm decision-making.
- Introduction of cattle vaccination, supported by a DIVA test.

Action beyond cattle

- Proportionate, science-informed management of TB in other farmed species, and wildlife.
- Expansion of badger vaccination in priority areas.
- Strengthening surveillance to better understand TB risk to cattle and inform action.

Governance and local leadership

- Clear roles, responsibilities and faster decision-making.
- Greater local ownership and practical action on the ground.
- Better use of data and local knowledge to inform and target action.

How the recommended strategy will be delivered

Delivery will be driven by a joint industry–government Strategy Board, bringing together government, farmers, vets, scientists and industry.

This will:

- Set and oversee the delivery plan.
- Keep progress on track.
- Ensure action is coordinated and guided by science.

Partnership is central. Success depends on government, farmers, vets and the wider sector working together, sharing responsibility and acting quickly when risks change.

There will be a strong focus on pace, coordination and clear delivery planning, so that action on the ground matches the ambition of the strategy.

Governance, learning and partnership

Good governance is key. The system needs to be clear, responsive and trusted. That means:

- Clear roles, responsibilities and decision-making.
- Clear and timely communication.
- Acting quickly when evidence or risk changes.

Learning from what works locally and nationally, and using this to improve over time.

Partnership working is not optional – it is essential to making the system work in practice.

How to use this document

This document is set out in four parts:

- **Part A** – The strategy: the vision, approach and recommendations.
- **Part B** – Delivery considerations: how to make it happen in practice.
- **Part C** – Evidence and context: the evidence, background and analysis behind the recommended strategy.
- **Part D** – How the strategy was developed and what people told us.

Together, they set out both the direction of travel and the practical considerations for delivery.

In summary

This strategy sets a clear path to achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free status in England by 2038, building on what already works, introducing cattle vaccination as a major new tool, and creating a stronger, more joined-up system that supports farmers and vets to manage risk every day.

Foreword

As Chair of both the co-design Steering Group and the Bovine TB Partnership for England, I am filled with optimism about what can be achieved by working together across the disease control landscape.

Bovine TB remains one of the most persistent challenges facing the livestock sector. It threatens animal health, undermines farm businesses, and places a heavy burden on rural communities.

This strategy sets out a clear and ambitious path to reach Official Bovine TB Freedom in England by 2038, grounded in science and evidence, innovation, and most importantly, genuine partnership.

We know there is no single solution, and success will depend on a comprehensive approach - improving testing, deploying targeted interventions, strengthening biosecurity, and supporting local ownership. Above all, success depends on collaboration, partnership working, and co-ownership.

Farmers, veterinarians, scientists, sector bodies, and government have worked together on this new recommended strategy and must work together to deliver coordinated action. Every person affected by bovine TB has a role to play. The enemy is the pathogen, and we must remain laser focused on that.

We cannot afford to stand still - the time for action is now - and I am delighted to give my support to this strategy - the first refresh in the approach for over a decade. Together, we can build a healthier, more sustainable future for English agriculture.

John Cross OBE

Chair of the Steering Group of the Bovine TB Partnership for England

Statements of support

British Cattle Veterinary Association

The British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) is pleased to have actively contributed to developing this new recommended strategy for bovine TB control in England, and thereby fully support it. This document reflects a genuine partnership between government, veterinary professionals, farmers, scientists and industry, recognising that sustainable progress against bovine TB can only be achieved through shared responsibility and evidence-led action.

The strategy rightly places cattle disease control at its core while acknowledging the importance of practical delivery, farmer wellbeing and veterinary expertise. It also recognises the need for innovation, improved use of data, proportionate risk management and stronger local leadership if we are to achieve Officially TB-Free status by 2038.

BCVA particularly welcomes the pledge to roll-out cattle vaccination by 2030 and the emphasis on collaboration between farmers and private vets and APHA, giving veterinary teams the tools and flexibility needed to support informed, proactive herd health decisions.

British Veterinary Association

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) welcomes the development of the Recommended Bovine TB Control Strategy for England and is pleased to have been involved in its development from the outset. The strategy reflects the importance of collaborative, evidence-led approaches to tackling bovine TB and aligns closely with BVA policy priorities, including improving animal health and welfare, sustainable cattle farming, strengthening veterinary involvement in disease prevention and control, and promoting partnership working across government, industry and the veterinary profession. BVA supports the continued commitment to a comprehensive eradication strategy that is practical, science-based and responsive to the needs of farmers, vets and rural communities.

National Farmers' Union

This is a critical moment in the journey to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (bTB). This refreshed strategy is therefore both important and eagerly anticipated. We have seen impressive progress through the collective efforts of farmers, vets and government, but bTB remains a devastating disease that continues to place a heavy burden on farming businesses.

The NFU has engaged in the codesign process and supports the goal of building on the progress achieved so far. There is still much to do: reductions in bTB prevalence remain insufficient, all available tools must be committed to suppress infection, deployed at the right time and place and guided by science and evidence.

Farmers remain central to controlling and eradicating bTB. The NFU's priority is that the Strategy empowers farmers and their vets with better data and supplementary testing. Addressing infection in wildlife and other non-bovine reservoirs should not be ignored – the NFU will continue to advocate evidence-driven, targeted wildlife control when and where necessary. We welcome the emphasis on governance, and value the potential of local delivery groups, which offer a more practical and responsive approach.

So, there is more to be done. Supporting the ambition within this document, we eagerly await the creation of the Strategy Board to drive this forwards. Farmers must be involved in shaping delivery plans to ensure this strategic direction transforms into deliverable outcomes. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with government and industry to see tangible change, which supports our farmers to continue reducing bTB.

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Part A: The strategy

1 Our Vision

By 2038, England will achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free (1) status under World Organisation for Animal Health requirements – protecting the health of cattle and people, supporting the wellbeing of farmers and vets, and contributing to the environmental and economic sustainability of farm businesses.

This vision is the foundation of this strategy. It sets out the long-term aim and reflects the findings of the Godfray Review (2025) (2), which confirmed that the goal of achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 is the right ambition. We recognise that achieving this vision requires sustained effort, improved agility and responsiveness in control processes, innovation, and collaboration between government and the cattle industry.

2 Why change is needed now

In this recommended strategy, "the system" means the whole network of people, processors, tools, and organisations involved in controlling bovine TB. It is this wider system that needs to adapt if England is to make faster, consistent progress. A new strategy is needed because only doing more of the same will not get England to Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 (See Section 13).

Bovine TB continues to place heavy and often persistent pressure on farmers, vets, and rural communities (3). Breakdowns disrupt businesses, affect herd health, and take a toll on mental wellbeing. Veterinary teams face increased workload, complex disease decisions, and pressure on time, capacity, and wellbeing (3). Despite real progress (4) since the 2014 strategy (4, 5), the disease remains the most persistent and disruptive animal health challenge in English livestock farming.

Bovine TB control efforts have major impacts on farms and farm businesses, and hence on the wellbeing of farming families (3). TB control efforts may also impact animal welfare, farmland ecosystems, rural communities, and wider society (3). Wildlife (used in this strategy to mean deer and badgers) control can bring environmental (6) and welfare (7, 8) impacts that sometimes divide communities. In recommending actions to control bovine TB, there is a need to balance impacts of the disease against these broader impacts.

Public attitudes towards farming, nature, and animal welfare have evolved (9, 10). This means actions, whether on cattle or wildlife, should be grounded in robust evidence and used where they will make a meaningful difference to bovine TB in cattle.

Bovine TB isn't fair. It hits some farms harder than others, and the impacts are financial, emotional, and practical (3). That is why this recommended strategy focuses on being proportionate and realistic - putting effort where it makes the biggest difference, helping people manage risk, and evolving the system so that we can adapt, learn, and improve over time. Done well, this will also contribute to better wellbeing for farmers and vets by making TB control clearer, more predictable, and easier to navigate.

We believe the system needs greater urgency, clearer direction and ownership, greater consistency, and a more proportionate risk-based, practical approach. Since the last strategy, the context for controlling bovine TB has changed significantly.

2.1 The disease picture is shifting in different parts of the country

Patterns of bovine TB are not the same as they were a decade ago (4). The shifting disease picture means England needs a more agile, locally responsive approach.

2.2 There are now better tools, diagnostics, and data

Since the last strategy, major improvements have been made in testing, surveillance and data availability (2). To make the most of these

advances, the system needs to be able to deploy them quickly and consistently, and to use data in ways that support timely, informed decisions.

3 Guiding principles for the future control system

These principles set out how we believe that England's bovine TB control system should work in the future, and they describe the behaviours and expectations that should guide all decisions under this recommended strategy.

3.1 Put the disease control needs of farmers and their vets at the centre

Farmers and vets need clear information, practical tools, and timely support. The system should help them to make informed decisions, to act quickly when risk changes, and to share local insight that improves both national and local delivery.

3.2 Keep disease control in cattle the priority

Reducing bovine TB in cattle must remain the focus, as achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status depends on controlling the disease in cattle. Actions on other species, both farmed and wild, should be proportionate, evidence-led, and taken where those species pose a clear risk to TB in cattle.

3.3 Ensure trust and confidence in cattle testing and diagnostics

Cattle testing must be explained clearly and used in a consistent and predictable way. People need to understand why a particular test is appropriate, and what the results mean, so that they can make well-informed decisions based on test results. Farmers should also be able to use additional, ancillary testing to support their own risk management, in order to complement but not replace statutory testing.

3.4 Strengthen shared responsibility

TB control works best when responsibility, decisions, and costs are shared. Government, farmers, vets, industry bodies, and wildlife managers should work together, each contributing to the parts of delivery that they are best placed to influence.

3.5 Support farmer wellbeing and resilience

The system should recognise the emotional, financial and practical pressures (3) associated with bovine TB – not only while herds are actively infected but also during test intervals and waiting to hear the results – and ensure that farmers receive timely and proportionate support.

3.6 Stay flexible, responsive, and evidence-based

The system must incorporate ongoing data collection and analysis and be able to respond with urgency when evidence or epidemiology changes. Flexibility helps to ensure that bovine TB control remains effective, proportionate, and grounded in real world experience. Decisions should be informed by evidence, leading to better assessment of risks, and better decision making.

3.7 Be transparent about decisions and priorities

People need to understand why decisions are made, what evidence is used, and how priorities are set. Clear, timely communication builds trust and consistency across regions.

3.8 Align actions with the vision

Every decision and intervention should support the 12-year plan of reducing infection in cattle and ultimately achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 (protecting the health of cattle and people, supporting the wellbeing of farmers and vets, and contributing to the environmental and economic sustainability of farm businesses).

Consistency and pace over time is critical for progress.

3.9 Minimise environmental impact

Bovine TB control should respect wider environmental aims, support nature recovery, and ensure any wildlife measures are humane, science-informed and proportionate.

3.10 Learning by doing

Tried-and-tested approaches should be used where they are available. But, where new approaches (for example, non-statutory cattle tests, cattle vaccination, badger vaccination) are likely to improve bovine TB control, we recommend implementing them in ways which allow learning about their effectiveness, to inform ongoing management and future policy.

4 What success looks like

4.1 Strategy goals

The following five goals set the direction of this recommended strategy and show what success would look like in practice, focusing on the areas where steady, sustained effort will make the biggest difference.

These goals guide how we recommend that England should tackle bovine TB. They are intended to inform the development of future policies and on farm actions, and to provide a clear, shared direction for everyone involved working towards Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038.

Goal	Description
Goal 1	**Sustainable reduction in bovine TB in cattle across regions:** Bring the incidence of bovine TB in cattle down year on year and keep it down, so cattle herds stay healthy, and England can be officially Bovine TB-free by 2038.
Goal 2	**Making timely and effective decisions:** Ensure that decisions around all TB controls are made effectively and in a timely manner, supported by reliable evidence and followed by well-designed monitoring. Clearly described objectives should allow decisions to be adapted as new evidence emerges.
Goal 3	**Innovation and learning by doing:** Try new ways to tackle TB, and learn what works in different areas, to help tailor approaches locally and guide the national plan.
Goal 4	**Building stronger partnerships:** Work together nationally and locally to bring the incidence of bovine TB down in cattle – decide together, share responsibility and costs, and support farmers and vets to make farm-level bovine TB control decisions.
Goal 5	**Managing disease risk to cattle from other farmed species, and wildlife:** Reduce the risk of TB spreading between cattle and other species (wildlife and farmed) in both directions through targeted, proportionate, humane, and evidence-led actions.

4.2 Outcomes: how we'll know the strategy is working

These outcomes describe what progress would look like if the strategy is working as intended. They are not formal targets or delivery milestones; they are indicators of whether the system is moving in the right direction.

Outcomes
Bovine TB incidence in cattle herds falls year after year across England, leading to Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038.
There is evidence from local implementation and pilots demonstrating which approaches are most effective in different areas. These approaches are implemented locally and, where appropriate, are used to inform national plans.
TB interventions are evidence-led, regularly reviewed, and adapted quickly in response to emerging learning.
Delivery of the strategy is a shared effort across farmers, vets, government and delivery partners, with shared responsibility and co-investment strengthening delivery and building confidence as all work together towards achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status.
The presence of *Mycobacterium bovis (M. bovis)* in wildlife and farmed non-bovine species is monitored and managed appropriately, so as not to prevent England from achieving Officially TB-Free status in cattle.

5 Strategy recommendations

The following sections are organised into three main areas, reflecting where action is most needed to reduce bovine TB in cattle and achieve Officially Bovine TB Free status by 2038.

Each section provides a short explanation of the issue being addressed, followed by the recommendations intended to drive change in practice.

5.1 Strengthening cattle-focused disease control

Why cattle actions matter

Most bovine TB spreads between cattle (11-14), particularly through cattle movements (15) and undetected infection within herds (15, 16). This strategy therefore prioritises measures that reduce transmission from hidden infection, risky trading and delays in detection and response.

Across England and the rest of the UK (5, 17) and internationally (18), the core route of bovine TB control remains the detection and removal of infected cattle, supported by movement controls and effective surveillance. These measures have been central to disease control in England to date and will continue to be the primary driver of progress towards Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038.

Biosecurity is a mindset, not just a set of physical measures

Biosecurity is about minimising the risk of introducing bovine TB onto a farm. It includes

actions to reduce the risk of infected cattle entering the herd, steps to reduce the infection risk from neighbouring cattle, and measures to restrict contact between cattle and potentially infected wildlife (19).

Maintaining biosecurity is more than a set of physical measures. It is a business mindset that influences day-to-day decision making. That starts with understanding risks and identifying opportunities to improve.

Biosecurity requires making informed choices about buying cattle, housing cattle, slurry management, and contact with neighbouring herds and wildlife (19).

Physical biosecurity measures should be accessible to implement on all farms and tailored to their individual circumstances and location or risk area.

Reducing risky behaviour

Reducing risky behaviour means giving farmers the right information, tools, and incentives to make lower risk choices, while making high-risk options harder or less attractive. It includes clear expectations, practical alternatives, training and advice to support behaviour change, and using monitoring and feedback to reinforce good practice.

Because geographic risk area boundaries cannot capture every nuance - low-risk herds can be found in high-risk areas and vice versa (20, 21) - managing risky moves between herds remains essential.

Herd risk scores

APHA produces a monthly TB risk score for every cattle herd in England (22), but this is not currently used to inform on farm decision making or cattle purchasing as it is not published. As a result, opportunities to better manage risk within and between herds are not realised.

Wider use of herd risk scores could help keepers to better understand and actively manage their bovine TB risk, support more informed discussions with private veterinarians, and inform safer, more risk-based cattle trading decisions over time.

Managing infection in persistently infected and high-risk herds

Some herds regain Officially Bovine TB-Free status despite a chance of residual disease in the herd (23), allowing unrestricted cattle movements and sales. The statutory testing regime imposed on a herd to allow them to regain Officially Bovine TB-Free status should be altered for persistently infected herds, and for those at the highest risk of becoming so or of experiencing recurrent infection. Herds at higher risk of retaining undetected infection should be targeted for more sensitive testing regimes to improve detection of undisclosed infected animals.

Cattle potentially exposed to TB, including resolved inconclusive reactors

Resolved inconclusive reactors are animals that give an inconclusive result to an initial skin test (the single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin, or SICCT, test) and a negative result to a re-test conducted approximately 60 days later (24-26).

Although these animals are not reactors under the statutory testing regime, their test history indicates a higher likelihood of having undisclosed TB than other TB negative animals (24, 27). As such, resolved inconclusive reactors present an additional risk to disease control if kept in the herd or moved into other herds.

More broadly, some cattle respond to TB testing in a way that does not reach the statutory threshold for classification as a reactor: this may indicate a higher likelihood of undisclosed TB than other TB negative animals. Farmers, in consultation with their private vet and APHA, should be encouraged to consider the cost-benefit of treating these animals as potentially exposed to TB and to manage them out of the herd (such as to slaughter) within a reasonable and defined period, particularly in herds experiencing recurrent or persistent breakdowns.

Resolved inconclusive reactors should remain permanently restricted to the holding where they were identified. The option to lift restrictions via interferon-gamma blood testing should also be removed, to prevent resolved inconclusive reactors from being traded and entering other herds.

Use of ancillary tests

A herd's Officially Bovine TB-Free status should not prevent keepers and private vets from working together to use validated ancillary tests, specifically TB diagnostic tests recognised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) (28), as complementary tools to support better risk awareness and understanding of potential M. bovis transmission at herd and individual animal level.

There is demand from some farmers and private vets to use these tests alongside the statutory testing programme to help better assess individual animal risk and support herd management, with the aim of reducing the likelihood of bovine TB breakdowns or disease spread within a herd. Where farmers, in consultation with their private vet and APHA, wish to fund and use ancillary tests alongside the statutory programme, this should be allowed.

Animals testing positive to a privately funded ancillary TB test (sometimes referred to as "responders" or "non-negatives") should follow a managed and time-limited approach. Where used in Officially Bovine TB-Free herds, movement restrictions apply only to these non-negative animals: the herd would retain Officially Bovine TB-Free status unless statutory tests or slaughterhouse detections led to loss of that status.

Ancillary testing would be permitted only within a private vet-led plan that sets clear timescales and biocontainment conditions, with APHA pre notification of tests and timely reporting of results to both APHA and the private vet.

A pilot of this option should be considered, allowing a small group of engaged keepers and their private vet to trial and help develop the policy, framework and action plans for non-negative animals. Communications alongside this pilot would support understanding and generate interest in ancillary testing becoming more widely available over time.

Cattle vaccination: future direction and ambition

Significant progress has been made towards a deployable cattle TB vaccine (29) and new DIVA (Detect Infected Among Vaccinated Animals) skin test (30). APHA's field trials of the vaccine and DIVA skin test are due to finish in 2026 and are designed to generate the scientific evidence needed for licensing and international acceptance (31, 32).

These steps are essential for gaining Great Britain (GB) marketing approval, securing international recognition through WOAH, and providing confidence that cattle vaccination can be used safely alongside other control measures. International interest in this new tool is high, and other countries are following its development with interest (33). The ambition for all must be for a deployable cattle TB vaccine and DIVA test in GB by 2030.

Cattle TB vaccine is likely to have the greatest disease control benefit when deployed in areas with high prevalence of disease. Therefore, initial roll-out of cattle TB vaccination should focus on selected high-risk areas, led by APHA, to support learning, adapt delivery approaches, and to generate further scientific and operational evidence on vaccine use in GB farms.

Vaccination should be made available more widely as soon as practicable on a voluntary basis for farmers who wish to use it to protect their herds.

Wide scale roll-out of cattle TB vaccination will require a long-term, financially sustainable model for both farmers and government.

Deployment of the DIVA skin test is the current rate-limiting step. Whilst the ambition remains

to deploy cattle TB vaccination alongside the DIVA test, there could be a few individual circumstances where farmers might want to use the vaccine before a DIVA skin test is ready, for example in persistent breakdowns in large dairy herds.

It will be important to remain open to novel and proportionate approaches to testing alongside vaccine use, to maximise potential disease control benefits.

Cattle-focussed disease control

Recommendation	Goal
Deploy a cattle vaccine with an approved DIVA test by 2030. Roll out Cattle BCG vaccine and its associated DIVA test immediately after APHA trials, licensing and international recognition. Alongside this, adapt testing protocols, where necessary, to ensure the DIVA test can be used effectively alongside vaccination.	**Goal 3**
Publish and promote clear herd-level TB risk scores to support testing and buying decisions. In the first instance, inform all farmers of their APHA herd-level risk score for TB. Support this with the provision of information on how the risk score is derived and what practical steps they can make to influence it down. Then once this is in place, allowing an appropriate amount of time for farmers and buyers to become familiar with the information, publish all farm-level risk scores enabling farmers to make better purchasing decisions and to know the risk score of neighbouring farms. Make this information available at point of sale to help inform buying decisions by displaying the herd risk status of all the farms a particular animal has been part of.	**Goal 2**
Plan an interactive platform or automatic system to provide TB data. Deliver a plan for an interactive platform where farmers and vets can see their TB information. In the long-term this functionality should be delivered through the new Livestock Information System (LIS). LIS and APHA systems must be developed in a coordinated way to ensure maximum usability for farmers and vets.	**Goal 2**

Track how farmers and other buyers use TB information. Monitor how farmers and other buyers use bovine TB information and measure the effect of its use on their purchasing decisions using monitoring data to improve promotion and use.	**Goal 3**
Provide TB data at point of sale. Farmers and other buyers should have access to relevant TB data at the point of sale. In the long-term this functionality should be enabled through the new LIS. Until then, an interim solution is needed so farmers and other buyers can make safer purchasing choices.	**Goal 2**
Make farm-level TB data sharing secure for vets, farmers, and APHA. Introduce an interim data sharing agreement that enables vets, farmers, and APHA to share farm-level data securely and in a timely manner.	**Goal 2**
Manage cattle potentially exposed to bovine TB, including resolved inconclusive reactors, through movement restriction and managed exit. Cattle identified as having a higher-likelihood of TB should be subject to movement restrictions and managed exit from the herd. This includes resolved inconclusive reactors, animals positive to validated non-statutory tests and, farmer-funded interferon-gamma blood tests, animals that are negative on the high specificity interpretation but positive on the high sensitivity interpretation. It could also include non-reactor animals that show a positive reaction to bovine tuberculin after the skin test. Cattle in this category should be restricted to the farm until sent directly to slaughter and should be managed out of the herd within an appropriate length of time (for example 12 months). Policy for resolved inconclusive reactors should be tightened by restricting movement permanently and introducing managed exit options. Where non-negative animals are retained within a herd, management arrangements would normally be expected to be set out within a private vet-led plan, produced by a vet who has undertaken the BCVA Accredited TB Veterinary Adviser training.	**Goal 1**
Give farmers and vets more choice in TB testing to support earlier detection and better risk management. While maintaining statutory testing, allow access to privately funded ancillary TB testing, during breakdowns and in Officially Bovine TB-Free (OTF) herds, where this can help identify infection earlier or support risk-based decision-making. Enable access to skin testing outside routine testing windows, where appropriate, and when agreed with APHA.	**Goal 3**

Adjust TB testing intervals to reflect herd risk more accurately. Introduce more frequent surveillance testing for high-risk herds in the Edge- and Low-Risk Area that are not already on annual or six-monthly testing. Review low-risk herds within the High-Risk Area to identify where it would be appropriate to change testing intervals from six-monthly to annual testing.	**Goal 1**
Enhanced testing in persistently and recurrently infected herds. Introduce more stringent statutory testing in persistently and recurrently infected herds across England. This is likely to include wider use of interferon-gamma blood testing and longer periods between skin tests. This should be supported by improved identification of herds at risk of persistence or recurrence, including strengthening the assessment of epidemiological, husbandry and management risks that predispose to infection and persistence, so that targeted interventions can be applied earlier and more effectively.	**Goal 1**
Uncover hidden infection to help herds stay clear for longer. Improve the detection of hidden infection by making interferon-gamma blood testing compulsory in Officially Bovine TB-Free Withdrawn (OTFW) breakdowns in England.	**Goal 1**
Assess ways to promote TB risk-based cattle trading. Evaluate the relative merits of different ways to encourage bovine TB risk-based cattle trading (once reliable herd and animal level risk information is available) including market-led incentives and clearer consequences for knowingly purchasing high-risk stock. The evaluation should consider impact, unintended consequences, practicality, equity and value-for-money for both the livestock sector and government.	**Goal 2**
Assess rules for TB biosecure units and ways to increase capacity and practicality. Evaluate the role of Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) in bovine TB control and assess whether current rules are proportionate to risk. Increase the capacity and practicality of AFUs and other biosecure routes to slaughter, recognising their critical role in supporting cashflow and maintaining animal health and welfare for farms under restriction.	**Goal 2**

Enhanced movement testing to protect farmers from inadvertently buying in infection. Introduce more sensitive movement testing (for example, export interpretation of the tuberculin skin test): • For all cattle moved from breakdown herds for 12-months after restrictions are lifted if APHA assess the herd is at higher risk of having a recurrent breakdown. • Then, for all cattle movements out of the High-Risk Area to Edge-Area or Low-Risk Area and from the Edge-Area to Low-Risk Area	**Goal 1**
Provide clear and rapid support at breakdown disclosure. At the point of disclosure, farmers, vets, and advisers should have easy and timely access to the resources they need – including farm-level data, local epidemiological information, and practical guidance on case management and biosecurity – presented in clear, user-friendly formats so that they can understand the situation and take the right next steps.	**Goal 2**
Set local targets within broad geographic Risk Areas. Adopt a more locally responsive TB control system by moving beyond broad national Risk Areas (High-Risk, Low-Risk and Edge) and instead setting local TB targets for smaller geographic areas based on local epidemiological patterns. These targets will provide a clear way of assessing whether progress in a particular area is on track, and would help testing, surveillance, and intervention decisions better reflect local disease patterns over time. Local targets will be distinct from herd-level TB risk scores and would not replace the national risk areas.	**Goal 3**

5.2 Action beyond cattle

Other farmed species

Other farmed species - such as sheep (34, 35), pigs (36, 37), goats (38, 39), deer (40-47), and camelids (48, 49) - can also be affected by TB, but current scientific evidence indicates their role in transmission to cattle in England is limited and they are considered "spill-over hosts" (50).

Managing TB breakdowns in non-bovine farmed animals can be resource-intensive, so action must be proportionate to the risk and based on scientific evidence. Government should maintain slaughterhouse surveillance for farmed species, encourage more sector-led efforts to control TB in these species, and continue reviewing the science to adapt their approach as cattle disease rates change. For now, the focus should remain firmly on reducing bovine TB in cattle.

Badgers

Research studies show that most cattle herds are infected by other cattle (11-14). The same studies also show that a small proportion of herds are infected by badgers, which can themselves be infected by cattle (13, 14, 51). Management which reduces the risk of badgers infecting cattle and vice versa should therefore support the delivery of the strategy goals. Such management should be effective, humane, and proportionate, with low environmental impact.

Government announced that the widespread Badger Control Policy would conclude before the end of this parliament. At the same time, the government announced its intention to increase the delivery of badger vaccination as a non lethal alternative to culling (52), which has been shown to reduce risk of infection and disease spread within badger populations. APHA simulations predict that, when delivered in the wake of recent culling, vaccination should allow populations to recover while continuing to reduce the number of infected badgers (53). With most of the High-Risk Area having received at least four years of culling, a transition to vaccination offers the opportunity to continue forcing TB levels down, while reducing environmental and welfare impacts.

Badger vaccination delivery has built strong momentum in recent years, with more than 4,000 badgers vaccinated in England in 2024 (54) and in 2025 (though these numbers have not been published yet). This progress reflects a growing collective effort, combining large-scale government delivery by APHA, including in several areas where licensed badger culling has ended (such as in Area 32 in Cumbria), with a local farming community led vaccination programme in East Sussex (55), and through several other stakeholder-led projects, including one led by the NFU (56). Delivery has been strengthened through increased government funding, alongside changes that have made badger vaccination simpler to license and administer (57).

The move away from badger culling naturally raised concerns among some farmers and others involved in TB control about how disease risk would continue to be managed as approaches evolve. This scepticism is shaped by concerns about the practicality of large-scale delivery and uncertainty about the scientific evidence related to the impacts of badger vaccination on TB in cattle (58). Through the Public and Stakeholder Dialogue workshops, people also told us that they want clarity and reassurance during periods of change, and that any transition in policy needs to be well sequenced, communicated clearly, and responsive to local disease risk conditions (See Bovine TB Strategy Refresh: Public and Stakeholder Dialogue Workshops – Research Report).

The next phase is about building on progress to date and expanding badger vaccination delivery where it can make the greatest difference. Scaling up badger vaccination at pace remains challenging, particularly given the relatively limited support for vaccination among some farmers (58). To address this, we recommend a continued focus on reducing costs, increasing

scalability, and strengthening the evidence base.

While badger vaccination is unlikely to be deployed at the same scale as the badger cull, it has an important role to play as part of a proportionate, science-informed approach. Therefore, in the short-term vaccination should be primarily government funded, targeted where it is likely to be most effective at reducing TB risk to cattle and combined with monitoring and surveillance to evaluate its impacts. Decisions must remain agile and evidence-led, adapting as new information becomes available. Strong governance, clear communication, and timely monitoring of disease patterns will help inform sensible next steps and ensure that disease risk continues to be managed effectively as TB control approaches evolve.

While the current government has committed to ending the badger cull by the end of this Parliament (52), the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (59) still permits the licensing of lethal badger control 'for the purpose of preventing the spread of disease'. Recent amendments have brought into law strict tests linked to the UK's commitments under the Bern Convention (60). While these tests have previously been applied as a matter of policy, these changes underline the requirement that a licence for anything that affects badgers, including lethal control, can only be issued if there is no other satisfactory solution and if the action will not harm the conservation status of badger populations.

This reiterates that lethal control of badgers can only be licensed in very exceptional circumstances, as a last resort, and where it is clearly justified. For example, scientific evidence would be needed to show that other approaches, such as badger vaccination, are not possible or have proven ineffective in the specific situation.

It is within this context that we recommend that the government should develop a framework, led by the relevant experts and timed to make use of new scientific evidence as it becomes available, to help future governments determine any instances when the demonstrably high legal and scientific evidence threshold for allowing lethal control (including for example, the Test & Vaccinate or Remove (TVR) approach piloted in Northern Ireland (61)) has been met.

Deer

In any deer (wild, park or farmed), suspicion of TB must be reported to APHA, as TB in deer is a notifiable disease under UK law (40, 62).

Actions taken in response to deer related TB risks should align with Defra's wider Deer Impacts Policy Statement : managing the impacts of wild deer in England, which emphasises shared ownership (with land managers and relevant sector organisations taking a leading role) and science-informed, proportionate, landscape scale management of wild deer (63).

Action beyond cattle

Recommendation	Goal
Use non-bovine and wildlife TB surveillance data to inform action. A clear process should be in place for using non-bovine farmed species and wildlife TB surveillance data to inform proportionate action, either in the affected species or in cattle - such as vaccination or movement restrictions - based on clear scientific evidence thresholds. Outcomes should be reviewed regularly so measures can be adapted or ended when they are either ineffective or have achieved their intended purpose.	**Goal 2**
Increase uptake of wildlife biosecurity measures. Increase uptake of practical, low-cost wildlife biosecurity measures by providing clear, consistent advice, improving understanding of their costs and benefits, and addressing barriers that prevent farmers from adopting practices.	**Goal 5**
Sector-led TB control for non-bovine farmed species with national oversight. Non-bovine farmed species' TB control and surveillance, including for deer and camelids, should be sector-led with national-level government oversight. This should include developing species-specific codes of best practice; implementing voluntary measures such as pre-movement testing where risk to cattle is identified; and promoting sector-led training for deer managers, farmers, vets, and landowners through trusted platforms.	**Goal 5**
Clear sample submission routes for non-bovine farmed species and wild deer. Clear information should be available to keepers and vets on how to access sample submission routes for non-bovine farmed species and wild deer, enabling them to contribute to surveillance where appropriate. Ongoing surveillance should be used to monitor the role of these species, enabling the approach to adapt if scientific evidence evolves.	**Goal 2**
Proportionate and cost-effective measures for non-bovine farmed species. TB disease control measures in non-bovine farmed species should be proportionate to the actual risk that they pose to cattle and deliver clear value for public funds, avoiding low-impact spending.	**Goal 5**

Badger vaccination in high-priority areas. Expand industry-led delivery of badger vaccination in targeted locations. For example, in areas where badger surveillance is taking place, where there is local enthusiasm, where approaches such as cattle vaccination or improved cattle testing are being taken, or where there is high or increasing incidence in cattle, taking an agile approach and being informed by science.	**Goal 5**
Expand access to badger vaccinator training and promote vaccination as a tool. Expand access to badger vaccinator training and promote badger vaccination as a practical tool, promoted jointly by government and industry.	**Goal 5**
Expand badger TB surveillance. Expand TB surveillance in badger populations by increasing found dead post-mortems as a core surveillance method; developing and deploying environmental polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing where appropriate and where it has demonstrated value; and blood sample collection during vaccination.	**Goal 5**
Assess impact and cost-effectiveness of badger vaccination. Epidemiological and surveillance data from badgers should be collected and analysed to evaluate the impacts of badger vaccination as a TB control measure and to identify the most cost-effective approaches.	**Goal 5**
Develop a framework to inform decisions about lethal badger control based on international consensus principles for ethical wildlife control. A framework should be developed to inform future decisions about lethal badger control as a disease management tool, in line with the current legislative basis and based on international consensus principles (64) for ethical wildlife control.	**Goal 5**
Develop a deer TB surveillance plan. A national wild deer TB surveillance plan should be co-designed by industry and government with stakeholders - including deer stalkers, landowners and land managers, farmers, vets, and deer managers - to ensure the approach is proportionate, science-informed and locally relevant. This plan should be aligned with wider land use and One Health (65) strategies, including the wider Defra work relevant to deer, such as the Deer Impacts Policy Statement (63) to support coherent, proportionate, and locally relevant action.	**Goal 5**

Enable deer owners, managers, and landowners to act quickly on TB risks that could affect cattle. Timely information, clear advice, and guidance should be available, so deer managers, landowners, farmers, vets, and deer stalkers know how to recognise TB in deer, and what to do when TB risk is detected. Trusted platforms, such as the TB Hub, along with local networks, should be used to deliver this to the right people quickly and consistently. Industry bodies, private vets, deer groups, and land managers should support rapid, proportionate action on the ground by sharing intelligence, promoting best practice, and strengthening local engagement networks that enable timely decision-making.	**Goal 5**
Communicate deer definitions. Clear definitions of wild, park, and farmed deer – including their regulatory status – should be communicated through industry-government channels.	**Goal 5**

5.3 Governance and local leadership

What effective governance must enable in delivery

Effective governance is essential to delivering this recommended strategy with pace, consistency, and confidence. It must support timely action when risks change, build trust in decision making, and enable farmers, vets, delivery partners, and government to play their full role in reducing bovine TB.

To do this, governance needs to actively enable the following:

Clear roles, responsibilities and decision pathways

Everyone involved in bovine TB control must understand their role, how it fits within the wider bovine TB system, and where decisions sit. Government leads on statutory decisions; farmers bring on farm knowledge and day-to-day management experience; vets provide clinical expertise and herd health advice; wildlife managers contribute ecological and wildlife management insight; scientists inside and outside government generate, analyse, and interpret data, and industry bodies support coordination, communication, and sector-wide good practice. Knowing who is responsible for acting, and when, is critical to timely and proportionate delivery.

Shared ownership and meaningful involvement

Progress depends on government, farmers, vets, delivery partners, scientists, and wildlife managers working together and sharing responsibility. Governance should enable constructive discussion of risks and trade offs, allow local experience and insight to inform national decisions where appropriate, and support collaboration across sectors. Local groups should be supported to form organically, with light-touch facilitation rather than formal structures, and well defined boundaries on what they can and cannot do within the statutory framework.

Transparency and trust in decision making

People need confidence in how and why decisions are made, and to know who makes them. Governance should require clear explanations of the evidence used, including scientific evidence, the rationale for changes, and how decisions move from local information to national action.

Timely response when risk or evidence changes

Governance should set out clear decision making routes, escalation points, and responsibilities so that action can be taken quickly when local risk changes - for example, during breakdowns, when new hotspots emerge, or when new scientific or epidemiological information becomes available. Everyone involved should know who is expected to act, in what order, and within what timescales, so responses are timely, proportionate, and consistent.

Align governance and action

Decisions in one area should reinforce progress in others. Joined-up governance across testing, surveillance, wildlife management, animal movement controls, data and communication is essential (while recognising that statutory decisions remain with government).

Strong connections between local and national action

Local knowledge is essential for practical delivery. Governance should give local groups, vets, and farmers clear routes to feed intelligence into national planning and to take proportionate local action within a national framework. APHA's role as a light-touch facilitator and technical connector should be recognised, helping local groups to access data, advice, and national decision routes without making groups feel 'owned' by government.

Learning, accountability and independent challenge

Governance should support regular learning, drawing on pilots, data, scientific advice, and feedback from stakeholders. Accountability

should be explicit and focus on improving outcomes, not assigning blame.

Governance should include clear, transparent and explicit accountability for acting on new evidence. A newly established national Strategy Board, as set out in the recommendation below, should draw on scientific and veterinary advice, with APHA providing technical expertise to support this work. Scientific oversight should be provided by Defra's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and Chief Scientific Adviser, supported by independent advice from Defra's Science Advisory Council. This Strategy Board should develop and implement protocols for how emerging science, operational learning and surveillance findings are assessed, how decisions are made, and the timescales, roles and responsibilities for taking action. Such protocols would ensure that the system can adapt quickly, act proportionately, and maintain confidence that evidence is translated into practice.

Governance and local leadership

Recommendation	Goal
Establish a joint industry–government Strategy Board to oversee and drive delivery of the bovine TB strategy. The Strategy Board will have multi-disciplinary membership (industry, government, science, vets and delivery partners) and be collectively responsible for driving delivery of the strategy. The Strategy Board will ensure that action in response to emerging disease risks is taken in a timely and appropriate way, supported by clear escalation routes, robust decision making, and strong coordination between policy, science and operational delivery (both in industry and government). The Strategy Board will set the delivery plan and be accountable to Ministers for its work, making sure that delivery activity across government, industry, and other key partners is joined-up, guided by science, and focused on delivering strategy outcomes (Minister retains statutory responsibility and political accountability to Parliament including statutory decisions, budget approval). To maintain momentum and avoid delay, the Steering Group of the Bovine TB Partnership should transition into an interim Strategy Board until the permanent Strategy Board is formally recruited. To support faster, more agile decision making, the governance model should also reduce the need for frequent or overly granular consultations by delegating decisions to the appropriate level within the governance structure. The Strategy Board should also provide a challenge function. Governance arrangements should specify which decisions remain with Ministers and which sit with the Strategy Board.	**Goal 4**

Develop and agree a delivery plan. To avoid any delay, the Steering Group should, as soon as possible, prepare an interim delivery plan to guide delivery during the first year of implementation of the strategy. The interim plan should outline priority early actions, provisional responsibilities, and mechanisms for coordinating activity across government and delivery partners. Once the Strategy Board is established, the interim delivery plan should be reviewed, updated and developed into the long-term delivery plan. This full delivery plan should specify how delivery of the strategy will be overseen, coordinated, and monitored - including funding, responsibilities, decision-making arrangements - ensuring that agreed and effective approaches are implemented without delay.	**Goal 4**
Develop and test financial models for bovine TB control. Explore co-investment approaches to support the long-term financial sustainability of disease control. This could include a range of mechanisms, such as cost-recovery, herd risk insurance, sector levies, or other models. . Economic modelling should be commissioned to assess the impacts of these options on disease outcomes, farm business viability and public finances. Modelling should also explore proportionate approaches to compensation, including the potential to link compensation to safer herd management, trading and testing practices, and to support and incentivise cattle vaccination uptake.	**Goal 3**
Create a model for coordinated bovine TB communications and locally led action. Coordinated communication: Establish a joint communication coordination function to ensure consistent national messaging to farmers and vets, proactive planning, and shared oversight of bovine TB communication. Coordinated local action: Alongside this, the Strategy Board should ensure that locally led groups can be connected and supported when needed – for example, where TB risk is high, when rapid action is required, or when consistent messaging is important across different areas. This is not about creating formal regional structures, but about having flexible mechanisms that allow local groups to align, share information, and coordinate action when circumstances require it.	**Goal 5**
Help farmers and vets get timely access to APHA advice. Farmers and private vets should be able to quickly reach the right advice and decision makers when they need support – for example through clearer contact routes to APHA veterinary and technical staff.	**Goal 5**

Maintain dedicated bovine TB delivery capacity in APHA and Defra. Secure long-term delivery capacity for the bovine TB strategy by maintaining ring-fenced APHA and Defra staff focussing solely on bovine TB, supplemented by the effective use of authorised testers, private vets, and supported by appropriate digital tools.	**Goal 1**
Accelerate locally triggered TB controls to reduce the risk of spread. Accelerate the implementation of locally targeted surveillance and control measures – such as radial testing, hotspot confirmation, and cluster investigations - to minimise delays between identifying risk and deploying action, reducing the risk of bovine TB spread during this period.	**Goal 1**
Enable farmers, vets, and other stakeholders to establish and lead local groups that take ownership of voluntary, non-statutory TB control actions. A national framework, jointly established by industry and government, should set out the scope of these local groups, the actions they can take, and the support available to them.	**Goal 4**
Use farmer insight to improve ibTB and TB Hub. Feedback should be gathered from farmers who use ibTB and TB Hub and assessed to identify how these tools can better support TB communication and engagement.	**Goal 5**
Improve targeting of TB controls through better use of data and analytical evidence. Epidemiological data capture and analytical capability should be expanded - including breakdown-farm information, automated cluster detection, and clearer scientific evidence on the effectiveness of wildlife interventions - so TB interventions can be more accurately targeted and applied at the right time.	**Goal 3**

Part B: How to deliver the strategy

6 Delivery considerations

6.1 Steering Group's delivery stance

This recommended strategy sets the overall direction for bovine TB control, but it is not an operational delivery plan. Day-to-day delivery of statutory decisions and the allocation of public funds remain the responsibility of government. However, we know that farmers, vets, and other stakeholders will expect a clear sense of how delivery will work and, to support that, we are identifying the high-level enabling conditions (the conditions that help delivery succeed).

These enabling conditions are intended to help government develop a clear and workable delivery plan that explains what needs to be delivered, how it will be delivered, and how progress will be measured.

A key risk is 'system stasis' in which bovine TB control continues on autopilot, especially during times of competing pressures. To avoid such stasis, the approach should remain ambitious, adaptable, learning-focused, and grounded in strong partnership working and APHA expertise.

The publication of a delivery plan must be the first task of the Strategy Board to:

a. Reassure farmers and vets that delivery is moving quickly.

b. Show a clear link between this strategy and what happens on the ground.

c. Allow operational work to develop in parallel (for example, IT improvements, cattle vaccination systems, digital livestock information systems).

6.2 Enabling conditions

These are the conditions that must be in place for successful delivery:

Area	Enabling conditions
Governance and coordination	Delivery works best when everyone understands their role, how decisions flow, and how to escalate issues. Local insight must feed into national decision-making without losing consistency. As TB control approaches evolve, delivery requires clear sequencing, practical coordination, effective use of available tools, and open communication.
Data, digital and information infrastructure	Delivery requires timely, trusted and easy to use data - including clear risk information, simple local epidemiology summaries, and workable interim data-sharing solutions while longer-term systems develop. The absence of fully developed IT solution(s) should not be a barrier to implementation where risks are clearly understood. In the interim, proportionate approaches such as targeted monitoring and spot checks can provide assurance while more comprehensive digital systems are put in place.
Workforce and delivery capacity	There must be sufficient capacity and capability across APHA, laboratories, private vets and trained badger vaccinators, supported by reliable training and coordination for new or expanded schemes.

Regulatory and legislative considerations	Some changes - such as strengthened pre-movement testing or new surveillance triggers - may require regulatory updates, which must be considered as delivery plans develop.
Crossborder working within the UK	Effective delivery depends upon good data flow and close coordination with Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, especially where differing policies affect farms near borders.
Funding and affordability	Sustained delivery requires stable, long-term resourcing, and consideration of where future co-investment models may support long-term sustainability.
Communication and engagement	Clear, trusted communication is essential for consistent delivery.

7 Managing delivery dependencies and risks

Effective governance must anticipate and manage the key dependencies and risks that could affect delivery. This includes staying ahead of things like cattle testing capacity, clear and accessible TB data, early planning for cattle vaccination and any trade implications, strong UK wide coordination, and ensuring that wildlife measures are practical and science-informed.

The right place to work through these issues in detail is the delivery plan which will set out how these dependencies will be managed in practice, how risks will be monitored, and what actions will be triggered when things change.

Local delivery groups may need small pots of flexible, practical funding to get started and to deliver simple, non-statutory actions. Seed funding for local groups should be simple to access, capped, and administered as close to farm-level as possible, moving over time from government structures toward a sector and industry led or mixed model once governance and groups are established.

8 Funding the journey

Achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 will require careful prioritisation of a finite budget. Government currently spends over £100m per year in England on bovine TB (66), most of which goes on statutory cattle testing and compensation to affected farmers. Farmers also make a substantial contribution to bovine TB control (for example through labour or consequential losses): estimates vary, with the recent Godfray Review suggesting it is around £75M (2). To make the biggest impact on reducing disease, resources need to focus on the activities that deliver the greatest benefit, while still leaving room to invest in new and innovative approaches that could accelerate progress. The farming industry also needs better support to invest themselves, for example through access to their TB data, private ancillary testing, as well as grants and co-funded partnerships.

The 2025 Godfray Review stresses that achieving Officially TB Free status will require a fundamental shift in pace and investment, warning that “there is only a small chance of meeting the target without a step change in the urgency with which the issue is treated and the resources devoted to eradication.” (2). Delivering that step change is a shared responsibility. Farmers, wider stakeholders, and government all have a role to play, including through exploring new funding approaches - such as risk linked compensation and co-investment models - that help make resources work harder while keeping solutions practical for those on the ground.

9 How government should use this strategy

This recommended strategy sets out the long-term direction that we believe is needed to reduce bovine TB and achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free status for England by 2038. It provides the strategic framework within which future decisions can be made, based on evidence, lived experience, and a practical understanding of delivery on the ground.

If government chooses to adopt this recommended strategy, there will be a need to translate the suggested direction into delivery and operational planning. This will include the creation of a Strategy Board and the preparation and publication of a delivery plan. There will then need to be the development of detailed programmes, policies, and timelines required to put the strategy into practice. These decisions and actions sit with government, farmers, vets, environmental stakeholders and other delivery partners and will depend on statutory, financial, legal and operational considerations. Decisions on how the strategy is delivered in practice will often be taken jointly with delivery partners, within the frameworks and safeguards set by government. Our recommendations are intended to support this process, not to prescribe it.

Part C: Evidence, context and constraints behind the strategy

10 How bovine TB behaves and spreads

10.1 What is *Mycobacterium bovis*

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is caused by bacteria from Mycobacterium Tuberculosis Complex, primarily *Mycobacterium bovis (M. bovis)*. *M. bovis* can infect many mammalian species, including people (67). It is this human health risk which ultimately justifies the commitment of successive governments to control bovine TB (5). Despite its wide host range, *M. bovis* mostly infects cattle (67). Other farmed animals (for example, pigs (36, 37), goats (38, 39), sheep (34, 35), and camelids (48, 49)) are occasionally infected with *M. bovis* but seldom transmit it to cattle (50).

10.2 The role of cattle in bovine TB transmission

Several studies which have used molecular genetics to track *M. bovis* transmission have consistently found that cattle-to-cattle transmission occurs more frequently than between species transmission (12, 13, 68). The nature of the disease and the imperfect diagnostics mean that the current system fails to detect and remove some infected cattle quickly enough. Those undetected infected animals are then able to transmit bovine TB within herds, and from herd to herd (2, 69). These facts are some of the most important issues this recommended strategy aims to address.

Herd breakdowns may involve multiple routes of infection (16), with movement of cattle capable of driving long and short distance spread of *M. bovis* (13, 15). Some herds may also play larger roles in bovine TB transmission than others, with a minority (20%) having been estimated in a 2005 study to account for most (≥80%) of the potential for disease spread (70). Alongside cattle movements, within-herd recurrence is a significant driver of disease (15). In 2024, nearly 56% of all cattle herds with a new TB breakdown in England had experienced another TB breakdown in the preceding 36 months of the disclosing test (23), and a previous study estimated that 25% of recurrent breakdowns in Great Britain were due to undetected infection (69).

10.3 The role of badgers in TB transmission

Studies indicate that a proportion of cattle herds are infected by badgers (12, 13). Cattle-to-badger transmission has also been confirmed by these studies (12-14). Hence, action to reduce transmission between badgers and cattle (in both directions) should contribute to bovine TB control.

Two key lines of evidence show that badgers can and do transmit *M. bovis* to cattle and hence contribute to the maintenance of bovine TB. First, three recent studies have used differences in the genetic code of *M. bovis* bacteria to identify subtly different strains and thus reveal chains of transmission from host to host. In the largest study of this kind, cattle-to-cattle transmission was found to occur on average 17 times more frequently than badger-to-cattle transmission (13). This study, and two others (12, 14) like it, suggest that there is substantial geographical variation in the frequency of badger-to-cattle transmission, although all show that cattle-to-cattle transmission is more frequent (12-14).

Second, studies of large-scale, systematic, proactive badger culling demonstrate that badgers can contribute to bovine TB transmission, with large reductions in badger density consistently associated with reductions in the incidence of TB in cattle (2, 71-74). Smaller reductions in badger density (including those caused by localised, nearby, or illegal culling) have been associated with increases in cattle TB, linked to badgers ranging more widely when their territorial structure is disrupted (74-78).

Cattle are also able to transmit *M. bovis* to badgers (12-14). Evidence of cattle-to-badger transmission emerged following the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic, when a year long cessation of cattle TB controls was linked to a widespread increase in TB in badgers (51), later confirmed through genome sequencing (12-14). In recent years, a strain of *M. bovis* introduced by cattle movement from Northern Ireland to Cumbria has been shown to have become established in the local badger population following cattle-to-badger transmission (14).

10.4 The role of deer in TB transmission

M. bovis infection in deer appears to vary geographically; its contribution to bovine TB in cattle is uncertain but likely to be patchy (43, 44, 46).

M. bovis infection has been detected, with different frequencies, in five of the six wild deer species present in the UK (Roe deer, Red deer, Fallow deer, Sika deer, and Muntjac deer) (41, 42). The pathology of TB in some deer species suggests that they could act as a potential source of environmental contamination and onward transmission to other species (42).

The baseline prevalence of TB in deer is believed to have been relatively low prevalence in the past, such that they were thought to pose a limited risk to cattle, relative to other wildlife (41). More recent data from some areas (for example in Oxfordshire), appear to confirm this pattern. However, in some other areas, a high prevalence of *M. bovis* infection has been recorded (45) consistent with the idea that TB is patchy in deer. Moreover, the ecology, pathology, and epidemiology of TB in some species, such as Red and Fallow deer, suggest that wild deer could pose a localised risk in specific locations (41). Cases in wild deer tend to reflect the wider TB situation in the surrounding area with similar genotypes in deer and cattle, although the direction of transmission cannot yet be determined (43). The 2025 Godfray review suggested that, given recent research in this area, further attention should be paid to understanding the role of deer in disease transmission (2).

11 Cattle testing and diagnostics

11.1 Statutory testing

Skin testing using tuberculin, supplemented in some instances by the more sensitive gamma interferon blood test, are the internationally recognised tests for bovine TB (18). However, no test is perfect, and so some infected animals can still be missed.

Test sensitivity is the probability that a test will correctly identify an infected animal as positive. Test specificity is the probability that a test will correctly identify an animal that is free from infection as negative. The higher the specificity, the lower the probability of incorrectly classifying an uninfected animal as infected (79).

Evidence indicates that herds in which only inconclusive reactors are identified on initial testing, but which subsequently test clear on re test, have a significantly higher risk of a future TB breakdown and a shorter interval to the next TB incident (80). Studies from Ireland, England, and Wales suggest that resolved inconclusive reactor animals are between seven and twelve times more likely to become reactors to the skin test at a later date (24, 27).

11.2 Antibody testing

In addition to statutory tuberculin skin testing and interferon gamma testing, there are tests which detect antibodies produced in response to *M. bovis* infection. They are not generally statutory tests in GB but are used in some circumstances to detect infected animals that do not respond to the skin and blood gamma tests.

Diagnostic antibody tests for bovine TB are reliant upon a prior intradermal injection of bovine tuberculin to maximise the sensitivity of the test (81). Antibodies present in the serum of infected cattle are often below the level of detection. Antibody levels are boosted by the injection of bovine tuberculin given during the skin test, which increases antibody responses

to detectable levels. Therefore, blood samples for TB antibody testing are taken 10-30 days post skin testing (81).

12 Vaccination

12.1 Cattle vaccination

Vaccination of cattle against bovine TB is a significant development in bovine TB control and has the potential to considerably reduce the threat of bovine TB worldwide.

The vaccine used to protect people from tuberculosis (BCG) can help to protect both cattle (82) and badgers (83). However, vaccinated cattle are sensitised to the standard tuberculin test and can return a false-positive result, so a new test is needed to identify infected vaccinated animals (30, 31, 84). Government scientists at APHA made a major breakthrough with the development of a new DIVA (Detect Infected among Vaccinated Animals) skin test which has shown strong efficacy in controlled studies. Field trials are ongoing and scheduled to finish in 2026 (32). The UK government has already submitted an application to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for the licensing of cattle BCG. Trials of this vaccine in high incidence settings in Ethiopia have demonstrated that the vaccine has the potential to substantially reduce the transmission of bovine TB between cattle, as well as affording protection in some individual cattle (82).

12.2 Badger vaccination

Badger vaccination is underpinned by published evidence that it is a safe and effective method of protecting badgers from infection and reducing *M. bovis* transmission in badger social groups (85). Vaccinated wild badgers were 76% less likely to test positive for TB than their unvaccinated neighbours, and cubs in social groups with over a third of adults vaccinated were 79% less likely to test positive (83). Farmers who saw declining numbers of badgers testing positive within a vaccination area in Cornwall were very enthusiastic about the approach as a control tool for bovine TB (86). Social research (58) indicates that many farmers remain sceptical of badger vaccination, citing concerns over its effectiveness, the practical difficulties of trapping badgers and costs, with more recent research (See Bovine TB Strategy Refresh: Public and Stakeholder Dialogue Workshops – Research Report) suggesting there has been little overall shift in these attitudes. This may improve as badger vaccination expands and more farmers gain first-hand experience of it, and improved TB monitoring in badger populations could support continued evaluation of the approach.

13 The current state of bovine TB in England

Over the past decade, bovine TB control has seen real progress in parts of England, and stubborn challenges in others (4, 23). Overall, the herd prevalence in England has fallen from a peak of 6.4% of herds not officially TB free at end April 2018 to 3.5% at end December 2025. Disease prevalence in the Low-Risk Area remains very low and stable, with reductions in some counties. In the Edge Area, sustained control efforts have stabilised incidence or slowed increases in many, but not all, areas. Improvements in how diagnostic tests are used, movement controls, and more consistent local engagement have supported this progress. However, herd incidence and prevalence remains highest in the High-Risk Area, and in parts of the Edge Area, where some of the highest incidence, and persistent and recurrent breakdowns, continue to affect some herds and communities (23). Progress is real, but fragile. Without renewed focus, greater agility in responding to changing risks, and shared responsibility, the goal of reaching Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 is very challenging.

The current state and a projection to 2038 is shown below. The grey area covers a range of values that herd prevalence could have between its peak in 2018 and a value of 0.2% in 2035 (3 years before the 2038 target for

WOAH recognition) (1). The black line shows the actual recorded herd prevalence values. The disease trajectory could follow any number of curves, and so the grey area is shaped to cover a plausible range; it is not produced from epidemiological forecasts, and is included only to give a general indication of what progress towards OTF status in 2038 could look like.

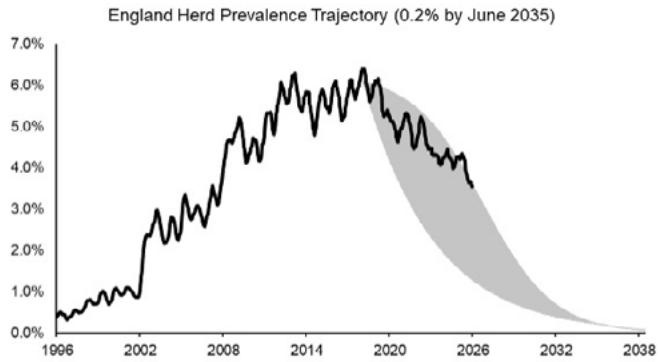


Figure 1. Example of how the herd prevalence trajectory toward OTF status could look (grey area), versus actual recorded point herd prevalence – percentage of herds not officially TB free (black line).

Strong measures are already in place - statutory cattle testing, slaughter of test positive cattle, movement controls, wildlife interventions and advances such as improved use of cattle diagnostics, badger vaccination, and closer industry collaboration (2, 5, 17). But to achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038, there is a need to go further: accelerate what works, trial new approaches, and share responsibility and costs to make the system more responsive, sustainable, and accountable.

14 The bigger picture: how farming is changing and why it matters for bovine TB

Farming in England is changing fast. These changes affect how cattle are kept, why and how far they are moved, how resilient farms are to disease, and whether different bovine TB control measures are practical. This section describes the wider factors shaping bovine TB risk and how the recommended strategy needs to respond. It does not comment on wider government policy; it focuses on what matters for disease control on the ground.

14.1 Changes in farming policy and support schemes

England's shift away from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (87) towards schemes such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) (88-90), Animal Health and Welfare Pathway (91), and wider Environmental Land Management (ELM) (92), offers new opportunities but also creates uncertainty as farmers adapt their businesses.

The recent Independent Farming Profitability Review, led by Baroness Minette Batters (2025) (93), highlights the need for a farming sector that is resilient, profitable, and supported through genuine partnership between government and industry. It stresses that strengthening long-term farm business viability requires clearer, more stable policy, improved supply chain functioning, and better alignment between economic and environmental goals. It also calls for a more coherent strategic direction for farming, underpinned by a new Farming and Food Partnership Board to strengthen collaboration across farming, food production, retail, and government (93). Partnership working and resilience are priorities for the NFU too (94). This change in focus is something we have looked to replicate for bovine TB control.

Why it matters for bovine TB

New farm support schemes and grants influence farmer behaviour and will affect their land and livestock management choices shaping disease risk (95). As farming policy continues to evolve, effective partnership with farmers becomes even more important to ensure that bovine TB control measures fit alongside wider business decisions. Uncertainty around support schemes can also affect farm resilience, making it harder for businesses to plan or invest confidently in long-term profitability, including in disease prevention infrastructure.

14.2 Farms are changing

Farm businesses in England are evolving in different ways. Some farms are getting bigger and using more high-tech systems, while some are focusing on nature-friendly practices and bringing in new income through other activities such as tourism or renewable energy (96). Farmers are also putting more emphasis on soil health, animal welfare, and using data to guide day-to-day decisions (97). Ongoing changes in the links between the beef and dairy sectors are also shaping bovine TB risk. As the national suckler herd gets smaller, more beef farms rely on dairy-bred beef calves to source their livestock. These calves often move from dairy farms to rearing and then on to finishing units, so the supply chain is stretched across many farms and regions (98, 99). Because many of these calves come from dairy herds located in higher-risk areas, there may be more movements from higher risk into lower risk areas. These changes increase the importance of robust and consistent movement testing, good on farm biosecurity, and making informed decisions when buying and selling cattle.

Why it matters for bovine TB

As farms change, so do the risks and opportunities for disease control. Different types of farms face different challenges - for example, larger herds have consistently higher bovine TB risk, partly because they have more animals and have greater potential for within-herd spread once infection is present (20, 76), while smaller or diversified farms may have more complex land use. Movements from higher risk areas increase the importance of robust movement testing, practical risk-based trading, clear information and strong on farm biosecurity. New technology and better use of data can help farms to improve biosecurity, decision making and herd health, and help to focus bovine TB testing and advice.

14.3 Cross-border differences in bovine TB policy

England (5, 17), Wales (100), Scotland (101), and Northern Ireland (102) apply different bovine TB testing, movement, and surveillance rules, and many farmers - particularly in the west and north of England - trade regularly across these borders (103). Differences in policy and control frameworks shape how disease risk is assessed, communicated, and managed across borders, including how risks associated with cattle movements are understood and mitigated. At the same time, the devolved nations operate different farm support schemes (104-106), meaning that farms close to borders must navigate varying requirements that shape how they plan, manage livestock and use their land. Together, these regulatory and policy differences add complexity for cross border businesses, influencing day-to-day farm decisions and long-term business resilience.

Why it matters for bovine TB

Different rules across the UK make bovine TB control harder for farms that trade or move cattle across borders. When testing schedules, movement rules, and paperwork change from one side of the border to the other, it adds complexity and increases the chance of delays and mistakes.

Support schemes can also pull farm businesses in different directions. Requirements on grazing, livestock management, or land use may differ depending on which country a farm operates in – even for fields only a few miles apart. These differences can influence how and when cattle are moved, housed, or grazed, which all affect bovine TB risk.

To reduce risk and keep businesses running smoothly, farmers and vets need clear rules, good communication, and close working between devolved governments.

14.4 Animal Health and Welfare Pathway

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway's aim is to foster continual improvement in animal health and welfare across the national herds and flocks in England through collaboration and co design with farmers, vets, and industry (91).

The Pathway offers several support schemes

to eligible farmers, including an annual animal health and welfare review (AHWR) and an endemic disease follow up. The annual review gives vets and farmers structured time to discuss animal health and welfare issues, with farmers receiving clear and achievable recommendations from their vet. The endemic disease follow up includes a biosecurity review, completed collaboratively by the farmer and their vet (107).

Defra has launched a consultation outlining proposals to make annual review visits mandatory for cattle, sheep, and pig farms in future (108). If adopted, this would provide farms with dedicated annual herd health and welfare discussion time.

Why it matters for bovine TB

The Pathway creates opportunities to integrate bovine TB risk management into routine herd health planning for other infectious animal diseases. It means that vets and farmers can work together on understanding and improving biosecurity as part of holistic health improvements, making bovine TB control part of routine herd health planning.

14.5 Trade and SPS Agreement

The UK is negotiating a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement with the European Union (EU) to reduce trade barriers for agri-food products (109, 110). This could mean fewer checks and simpler certification for moving animals, food and animal by-products between Great Britain and the EU but also might mean closer alignment on statutory disease control approaches.

Why it matters for bovine TB

Changes to trade rules can affect cattle movements and disease risk. Aligning with EU standards may influence England's testing and certification requirements, so it is important to make sure that bovine TB controls remain appropriate while supporting market access. Approaches to bovine TB control across the UK and EU are already very similar given that both follow global standards set by WOAH (1, 18, 33).

14.6 Climate and environmental pressures

The UK will likely experience hotter, drier summers, warmer, wetter winters, and more frequent extreme weather events, including heavy rainfall, droughts and heatwaves (111). These changing conditions will affect grazing availability, grass growth, cattle housing needs, disease risk, and day-to-day livestock management. More extreme weather, changing grazing patterns, and land use pressures all shape how livestock systems operate (112). Farms will have to adapt to these evolving conditions.

Why it matters for bovine TB

Stress, disrupted grazing and changing housing systems can affect cattle management and disease susceptibility (95, 113), and risk bovine TB spread. Bovine TB control must keep pace with these shifts while remaining practical for farmers, including ensuring that it does not hinder farmers' ability to implement climate mitigation and adaptation measures.

14.7 Public focus on nature and animal welfare

Growing interest in environmental issues by government (114), farmers (115), and the public (9) has intensified the focus on nature, with growing interest in sustainability (10), wildlife-friendly farming (115), and rewilding (116). At the same time, there is strong and growing public interest in animal welfare (117). The public recognises a need for wildlife management to be sustainable, humane, ethical, and proportionate (118).

Why it matters for bovine TB

Expectations around nature recovery influence what is considered proportionate and acceptable in wildlife management. Bovine TB control must adapt to this growing recognition of the importance of nature and animal welfare, while remaining focused on achieving Officially Bovine TB-Free status.

15 Delivery, economics and governance

15.1 Where delivery needs stronger support

Feedback from across the strategy refresh process consistently highlighted delivery related concerns that go beyond individual policy measures and point to wider system pressures. Farmers, vets, and delivery partners described confusion over roles and responsibilities, inconsistent communication, difficulties accessing timely and usable data, and a lack of clear, responsive local support.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of clear routes for local intelligence to be captured, understood, and fed into delivery bodies and governance. Where feedback loops are weak or opaque, opportunities to act early or proportionately can be missed, and confidence in the system is undermined. These issues were seen as particularly problematic during breakdowns, emerging hotspots, or when new risks or evidence arise.

Although the context for controlling bovine TB has changed, the way the system operates has not always adapted at the same pace. People across the farming and veterinary sectors told us that slow or complex processes delay action and make effective disease control harder. Limited agility and responsiveness compromise progress, particularly in situations that require rapid decision making.

Together, these issues highlight areas where delivery is under strain and where more consistent support, clearer connections between local and national action, and stronger feedback mechanisms are needed. Without changes to how bovine TB is managed and delivered in practice, England's current trajectory is unlikely to achieve Officially Bovine TB-Free status by 2038 (See Section 13). This helps explain why the strategy places such emphasis on timely action, clearer roles and a more adaptive, evidence-led approach.

15.2 Economic rationale for controlling bovine TB

Bovine TB control places significant costs and disruption on farmers, vets, and rural communities (3, 119). The infection of a herd affects business continuity, animal health, and farmer mental wellbeing. Without coordinated national action, the total cost of the disease to farmers and taxpayers would be significantly higher. National bovine TB controls also protect wider public interests: they reduce risks to trade, safeguard public health through surveillance and food safety measures, and prevent the animal health impacts that would grow if the disease were to be left unchecked (67).

Farm-level action is essential, but it cannot deliver Officially Bovine TB-Free status on its own. That is why we need a clear national framework: cattle surveillance and testing, rapid removal of infected cattle, movement controls, and accessible advice and support, delivered consistently and adjusted as risk changes. Government has a central role in setting and enforcing statutory measures, protecting market access and public interest, and making sure the system works for everyone - while farmers, vets, and delivery partners use that framework to take confident, practical action on the ground.

The Steering Group recognises that a sustainable approach will require significant and ongoing investment, and that the system must use resources where they deliver the greatest benefit. Proportionate, prompt and evidence-led interventions, earlier and improved detection, better risk management, and clearer information all help to make the best use of limited resources across the system. Independent reviews, including the Godfray Review (2025) (2), stress the importance of sustained effort, prioritisation, and long-term planning if England is to make meaningful progress.

Further co-investment will be essential. Farm businesses already make huge contributions to bovine TB control by, amongst other things, providing physical and labour resources for testing, improving biosecurity on their farms, and absorbing the production losses caused by cattle culling and movement restrictions. These

support government investment in testing, providing compensation for culled cattle, and APHA resources to deliver statutory activity. Delivering this strategy will require investment from both government and industry, building on the contributions already made by different parts of the system. Future approaches must balance affordability and practicality for those involved. We are not recommending specific funding models, but shared responsibility and continued co-investment will be central to sustained progress as well as using the whole budget, including compensation, as investment in disease control.

Reaching Officially Bovine TB-Free status will deliver long-term savings for both farmers and taxpayers. With less disease to manage, testing and compensation costs will fall, trade certainty will improve, and farm businesses will face fewer disruptions. Coordinated bovine TB control is a shared investment that protects livelihoods now and reduces costs over the long-term.

This recommended strategy therefore aims to provide a stable, long-term direction that enables government, delivery partners, and farmers to plan, invest and prioritise effectively. It does not prescribe funding decisions or financial commitments, but recognises that affordability, co-investment, and economic impacts will need to be at the heart of any future delivery planning.

16 Governance and local leadership

Evidence gathered through the strategy refresh process indicates that weaknesses in governance are constraining the effectiveness and pace of bovine TB control. Farmers, vets, delivery partners, wildlife organisations, and members of the public consistently described a system that can be difficult to navigate and slow to respond when risks change (See Bovine TB Strategy Refresh: Public and Stakeholder Dialogue Workshops – Research Report).

Feedback highlighted recurring concerns about unclear leadership and decision routes, inconsistent communication, difficulty accessing timely and usable data, and uncertainty about where responsibility sits for acting. These issues affect confidence in the system and can delay proportionate responses during breakdowns, emerging hotspots, or when new evidence becomes available.

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of better connections between local insight and national decision making. When feedback loops are weak or opaque, opportunities to learn early or adapt approaches can be missed, and trust in decisions is reduced.

Evidence points to governance arrangements that are not consistently providing the clarity, pace, or coordination needed to support effective delivery, which is why changes to governance is a central part of this recommended strategy. The governance enablers needed to address these issues - and to support faster, more confident and coordinated action - are set out in **Part A**.

Part D: How the strategy was developed and what people told us

17 Who we are and how we worked

The bovine TB Partnership for England was tasked by Daniel Zeichner, then Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries, to produce a refreshed disease control strategy. To work at pace, key expertise was identified to take this work forward, forming a Steering Group from within the wider Partnership in 2024 (120). The Group brings together those with direct experience of bovine TB and its impacts: farmers, vets, industry bodies, government, and scientists.

We developed this recommended strategy through a co-design process that combined scientific evidence with lived experience. The Steering Group drew on the findings of the Godfray Review (2025), insights from a national Public and Stakeholder Dialogue workshops (See Bovine TB Strategy Refresh: Public and Stakeholder Dialogue Workshops – Research Report), and the detailed work of strategy refresh working groups which involved over 100 individuals (chaired by Bovine TB Partnership members who were typically not on the Steering Group). We met regularly to test ideas, challenge assumptions, and understand the implications of different approaches for farmers, vets, wildlife managers, and government.

Our discussions were extensive, open, constructive, and focused on finding practical solutions. Not every member agreed on every issue, but we worked to identify shared principles, build consensus where possible, and be transparent where differences remained. Where we could not reach a single position, we recorded the range of views openly and set out the implications for government and delivery partners.

18 Feedback from public and stakeholder dialogue workshops

To help shape this strategy, Defra commissioned Ipsos to run national Public and Stakeholder Dialogue workshops in (See Bovine TB Strategy Refresh: Public and Stakeholder Dialogue Workshops – Research Report).

This brought together three groups:

- Farmers, vets, and agricultural stakeholders.
- Members of the public.
- Environmental sector organisations.

All groups took part in structured workshops to explore the challenges of TB control and the trade-offs involved in different approaches. Participants were given balanced evidence, heard from experts and practitioners, and had time to test ideas, question assumptions, and try to build shared understanding.

18.1 What matters most

The themes below reflect what people consistently raised as mattering most.

Accurate, trusted cattle testing and clear information

People want cattle tests they can trust. Farmers and vets raised concerns about accuracy and how results are explained. The public quickly saw how vital cattle testing is and called for more transparent information about how tests work. Environmental stakeholders also asked for more sensitive tests to show the true disease picture in cattle and inform control actions.

Timely and effective data-sharing with farmers and vets

Farmers and private vets told us they need quicker, clearer, more local data; they want timely information about nearby breakdowns, herd

history, cattle movements, and local TB trends. Public participants also stressed that decisions should be based on up-to-date evidence.

Consistent, transparent communication

Across all groups, people highlighted gaps in communication. Farmers described unclear or inconsistent messages and difficulty reaching the right person. The public wanted clearer explanations of government decisions. Environmental stakeholders asked for more openness about evidence and rationale. People want communication that is straightforward, timely, and easy to act upon.

Support for farmer wellbeing and practical decision making

Farmers described the emotional and financial strain of experiencing a bovine TB breakdown in their herds. The public strongly supported more help once they understood these pressures, and environmental stakeholders also recognised the toll the current system takes. People asked for practical, on farm support and clearer guidance when herds are affected by bovine TB.

A focus on cattle-to-cattle transmission, and proportionate wildlife measures

There was broad agreement that TB spreads mostly between cattle. Public and environmental stakeholders wanted cattle measures prioritised. Farmers accepted this, but also drew attention to wildlife risks, particularly in areas where badgers or deer may play a role. Public and agriculture stakeholders supported wildlife measures only where they are evidence-led and proportionate.

Faster local action and clearer processes when risks change

Farmers said that they need quicker, more predictable action during breakdowns or where hotspots of infection are emerging in new areas. Slow data sharing, unclear escalation routes, and inconsistent responses were seen as barriers. The public wanted more consistent rules across regions. Environmental stakeholders emphasised the need for timely, targeted action based on good data.

Shared responsibility and better coordination

People across all groups called for clearer roles and better joined-up working. Farmers want APHA, private vets, and local partners to be more aligned. The public felt farmers and vets should have more say in testing decisions. Environmental stakeholders wanted more consistent rules. Everyone agreed collaboration is essential.

Practical, day-to-day operational support

Farmers were clear about the help they need to act quickly and confidently. They asked for:

- Shorter, clearer breakdown summaries.
- Simple, timely hotspot updates.
- Clear “what to do now” steps.
- Named APHA contacts with predictable call backs.
- More visible APHA presence at marts and local events.

19 Working group leadership

The development of this recommended strategy was supported by thematic working groups, each chaired by members of the Bovine TB Partnership (England). Working group chairs played a key role in facilitating discussion, synthesising evidence and stakeholder views, and developing recommendations. They also participated in workshops with the Steering Group to discuss recommendations feeding into the Steering Group’s consideration of the final strategy.

Working group chairs are named below in their individual and professional capacities.

- Professor Gareth Enticott – human geographer.
- Dr Lindsay Heasman – animal health consultant.
- Kate Bowen - private veterinary surgeon.
- Sarah Tomlinson – private veterinary

surgeon.

- Dr Jane Gibbens – consultant epidemiologist.
- Professor Rowland Kao – mathematical biologist.
- Professor James Wood OBE – veterinary epidemiologist.
- Paul Westaway – farmer (High-Risk Area).

20 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who have contributed their time, expertise, and insight to inform the development of this recommended strategy.

We are grateful to the more than 100 individuals from industry, academia, delivery organisations, government, and stakeholder groups who participated in working groups and workshops. Their contributions helped shape the strategic priorities, recommendations and governance arrangements set out in this document.

21 Citation

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Glossary

Ancillary testing

Private voluntary tests supplementary to the main screening test (the skin test) used to provide extra information or support decision making.

Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

A UK government executive agency, part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), responsible for safeguarding animal and plant health, monitoring and controlling diseases and pests, and protecting public health, the environment, and the economy.

Approved Finishing Unit (AFU)

A holding in the High-Risk or Edge Area approved and licensed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) where cattle—often from TB restricted herds—can be reared, fattened, or finished under strict biosecurity and movement controls before going to slaughter or another AFU.

Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG)

A vaccine derived from a weakened strain of Mycobacterium bovis, used to protect against tuberculosis (TB).

Biosecurity

Measures taken to prevent the introduction and spread of bovine tuberculosis infection between cattle, farms, and wildlife.

Breakdown

When a cattle herd loses its TB free status following suspicion or confirmation of bovine tuberculosis infection.

Co-investment

A shared approach where government and industry both contribute resources to fund and deliver bovine TB control measures.

DIVA

Detect Infected from Vaccinated Animals: a diagnostic test that distinguishes animals infected with TB from those that have been vaccinated against it.

Higher likelihood cattle

Cattle considered more likely to be infected with or exposed to bovine TB, based on epidemiological risk factors.

Hotspot

A defined area in England's Low-Risk Area where enhanced bovine TB surveillance and control measures are implemented for a limited period following detection of one or more confirmed (culture-positive) TB breakdowns of uncertain origin.

Inconclusive Reactor (IR)

An animal whose TB skin test result is neither clearly negative nor positive, meaning the reaction is not strong enough to confirm infection but not low enough to be considered disease free.

Managed exit

Controlled and restricted release or movement of animals at higher likelihood of bovine TB (for example resolved IRs) to minimise the risk of bovine TB transmission.

Movement restriction

A legal restriction placed on a cattle herd or holding that limits or prohibits the movement of animals on or off the premises, applied as part of bovine TB control measures to prevent the spread of infection.

Movement testing

The statutory testing of cattle for bovine tuberculosis before and/or after movement between holdings in England, undertaken to reduce the risk of spreading undetected infection between herds and geographical areas.

Non negatives

In Officially TB-Free herds, animals testing

positive to a privately funded ancillary TB test (sometimes referred to as "responders" or "non-negatives") should follow a managed and time-limited approach.

Non-reactor animals

Cattle that have undergone an official bovine TB test (usually the tuberculin skin test) and do not show a positive reaction, meaning they are not classified as reactors (infected animals).

Official Bovine TB Freedom/Free status An internationally recognised standard set by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

OTFW

Officially TB Free Withdrawn. A herd becomes OTFW when it has a TB breakdown (i.e. infection confirmed or strongly evidenced). For example, OTF status is withdrawn if: a TB skin test reactor is found, a positive lab result (PCR/ culture/blood test) is obtained or TB lesions are confirmed at slaughter.

Persistent TB breakdown

Herds that have lost their Officially TB-Free status (either suspended or withdrawn) for more than 18 months.

Recurrent TB breakdown

Herds that have a TB breakdown (either confirmed or not confirmed) within 3 years of a previous outbreak. Recurrent breakdowns can occur due to a number of factors which includes residual infection, exposure to infected wildlife, poor biosecurity, and high-risk trading practices.

Resolved IR

An animal that previously had an inconclusive TB skin test result but has since tested negative, while still considered at increased risk of infection.

Risk area

The classification of England into high-risk, edge, and low-risk zones based on TB prevalence, used to apply proportionate surveillance and control measures.

SAC

The Defra Science Advisory Council (SAC) is an independent expert body that provides scientific advice to the UK government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Science-informed

Science-informed decisions are those informed by a diverse range of natural and social science perspectives, and taking into account wider agendas supporting environmental and farm sustainability.

SICCT

Single Intradermal Comparative Cervical Tuberculin Test: The primary statutory screening test for bovine tuberculosis in cattle in the United Kingdom, two injections are made, one of M. bovis tuberculin and the other of Mycobacterium avium tuberculin, and the two compared to determine whether an animal is negative, inconclusive, or a reactor.

SIT

Single Intradermal Tuberculin (SIT) test: A diagnostic skin test used to detect bovine tuberculosis in live cattle, in which a purified protein derivative (tuberculin) from Mycobacterium bovis is injected into the skin; animals previously exposed to the bacterium develop a delayed hypersensitivity reaction (swelling) at the injection site, indicating possible infection. The absolute size of the lump is measured to determine whether an animal is negative, inconclusive, or a reactor.

Surveillance testing

Routine, legally required herd testing in England, carried out at risk-based intervals to detect and monitor bovine TB and maintain OTF status.

TB negative cattle

Cattle that have tested negative for bovine tuberculosis and show no detectable evidence of infection at the time of testing.

The system

"the system" means the whole network of people, processors, tools, and organisations involved in controlling bovine TB.

VMD

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) protects animal health, public health and the environment.

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