

bTB control is changing and it puts farmers in the driving seat.

Bovine TB control brings disruption, uncertainty and, at times, a feeling that decisions are being made elsewhere, often repeating what has gone before. Many farm businesses have lived with the strain of repeated breakdowns, restrictions, and the knock-on impact on families, staff and vets.

The refreshed English bTB Strategy marks a deliberate break from that pattern. It is built on robust science and evidence, shaped directly by the experience of farmers and vets living with the disease, and designed to move faster, work smarter and enable practical action on farm.



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Crucially, this thinking has not been developed in isolation. It is the product of an extensive process, bringing together over 100 individuals from across the sector including farmers, vets, scientists, industry bodies and government.

In some parts of the country, TB levels are at their lowest in over 20 years, clear evidence that sustained effort is working. But that progress is not consistent, and too many farmers are still facing the devastating reality of this disease.

As Professor Godfray and colleagues made clear in their 2025 review update, continuing with the current approach will not get England to TB-free status by 2038.

At the heart of the strategy is a simple but important shift in mindset. Those closest to the farm, farmers and their vets, are best placed to manage TB risk, provided they have the right information, the right tools, and the flexibility to act.

Decisions will be made closer to the farm, supported by clearer and quicker access to advice and data from APHA. Local collaboration, through farmer and vet-led groups, will play a bigger part in responding to emerging risks. Rather than waiting for problems to escalate, the system will be better set up to act early, with confidence and clarity.

The approach to cattle-to-cattle transmission, where we know most TB spread occurs, will also change. Testing will become more risk-based and fairer, meaning lower-risk herds are not burdened unnecessarily and higher-risk herds are tested more effectively. Access to non-statutory testing will be easier and barriers to voluntary uptake reduced. This will allow hidden infection risk to be managed, with the aim of reducing repeat breakdowns and helping farms get clear more quickly. This will also decrease the risk of infected cattle being introduced into other herds. Farmers will have access to better information on herd TB risk, when purchased cattle, allowing them to make more informed and proportionate decisions.

Alongside this, there is a more balanced and practical approach to managing risks from the wider environment. The focus will be on measures that work on farm, for example reducing badger and cattle indirect contact, through managing feed and water supplies and reducing opportunities for disease

transmission. This will be supported by better local intelligence on where risk genuinely exists in wildlife, badgers and deer. Wildlife interventions will continue to be used where the evidence shows they add value, but within a more targeted, proportionate framework.

One of the most important changes sits around data. Farmers and vets have been clear, they need access to their own TB data. Information that is timely, easy to understand and useful for decision-making. The strategy prioritises improving access to animal level, herd-level and local TB risk information, alongside tools such as TB Hub and ibTB, so that farmers and vets can act on emerging risks before they turn into problems.

There is also a decisive shift towards prevention. TB control has too often been about reacting once infection is found. The refreshed approach places much greater emphasis on stopping breakdowns before they happen, through better biosecurity, smarter trading decisions and earlier intervention where local wildlife risk increases. At the same time, the strategy prepares the ground for new tools, including cattle vaccination, which should become a major part of long-term TB control.

Government, through Defra, and operational delivery through APHA, remain critical to success. Their role is not diminished but refocused, providing the framework, the science, the tools and the capacity that allow farmers and vets to take greater control.

The long-term goal has not changed: achieving Officially TB-Free status by 2038. What has changed is the route to get there. This is a move away from a one size fits all system towards one that is more agile, more responsive and more grounded in real world farming. It is a shift from reacting to disease to managing risk proactively. And, crucially, it is a shift from feeling powerless to having the tools and support needed to act.

Bovine TB should not be inevitable. The disease can be controlled and ultimately reduced to the point where it no longer defines farm businesses and rural communities. But that will only happen if action is taken earlier, decisions are made closer to the ground, and everyone involved is equipped to play their part.