



BCVA Policy Statement

Bovine tuberculosis

Revised version 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bovine tuberculosis (bTB) remains one of the most complex and persistent endemic livestock diseases in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The farming industry and veterinary profession share a strong, long-standing partnership that aims to control and manage the disease, with the ultimate ambition -to eradicate bTB in the UK.

Behind every herd breakdown lies a profound human cost: the mental health burden of bTB on both farmers and vets is significant, and too often underestimated. This shared experience is an important dimension of this disease that must be acknowledged and addressed, alongside its clinical and economic impacts.

This policy is focussed on what we can do – how we can take control – the ways we can work together to reach eradication. To this end, BCVA continues to strongly emphasise the pivotal role of the private veterinary surgeon (PVS) and recognises that effective disease control requires co-ownership by farmers, vets, government, and industry stakeholders.

Since the previous policy (initially launched in 2021), there have been significant developments: the *Godfray bTB Evidence Review Update 2025* (Defra) was published, intended to inform a new comprehensive bovine TB strategy for England, reconvening expert analysis of evidence since 2018. This update confirms that bTB remains entrenched and that progress requires acceleration of testing, vaccination, wildlife management, movement controls, and governance reforms.

BCVA's revised policy reaffirms its evidence-based, pragmatic approach and sets out updated objectives, emphasising enhanced diagnostics, vaccination and DIVA capability, biosecurity, PVS empowerment and training, and measurable disease management goals.

Policy Development - Updated Context

In 2018, the original *Godfray Review* outlined broad scientific and policy options for TB control. In 2025, Defra published an updated evidence review reconvening the original panel (with some membership changes) to reassess substantive science since 2018 and support development of a refreshed bTB strategy due in 2026.

Alongside this, at the time of writing, BCG vaccination is being submitted for marketing authorisation, and DIVA (Differentiation of Infected and Vaccinated Animals) is in Phase 3 field trials.

BCVA's updated position outlines seven key policy areas that demonstrate a comprehensive, holistic approach to the management and control of bTB: The role of Private Veterinary Surgeons, Governance and Regulatory Reform, Cattle Vaccination, Surveillance and Testing, Delivery of Testing, Biosecurity, Cattle Movement, and Training.

These policy points bring together strategies and stakeholders, with the assertion that it is only by combining our tools, resources, and skills that we can hope to gain control of the disease and ease the economic and emotional burden that accompanies bTB.

Acknowledgements

This document has been brought together thanks to the commitment of the entire BCVA Board, with notable contribution from the TB Working Group led by Ed Simmons, along with the generous support of past BCVA Board member, Rebecca Cavill of Torch Farm Vets.



Seven Policy Priorities

1. THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE VETERINARY SURGEON (PVS)

BCVA is convinced that vets are central to driving long-term TB control, as trusted advisors with deep herd-level insight. PVS should not be limited to statutory testing but should be equipped and empowered to

- deliver bespoke TB herd health and risk reduction plans with clients.
- consider a broader range of diagnostic tools (including gamma interferon, DIVA, and serological tests where appropriate).
- analyse and interpret test results to inform tailored control strategies.
- give tailored advice in a breakdown to allow trade and business continuity, while preserving animal welfare on farm.
- contribute to farm-level disease surveillance and post-breakdown management.
- support farmers through the crisis of a bTB breakdown in their herd.

BCVA advocates expansion of the BCVA Accredited TB Veterinary Adviser (BATVA) accreditation programme to broaden the cohort of vets trained in advanced TB risk assessment and bespoke on-farm control advice.

LOOKING AHEAD ...

- See BATVA accreditations achieved each year increased by 10% through to 2028.
- Monitor and report reduction in recurrence rates on BATVA-guided farms versus average.
- Lobby to have the BATVA included in the response to the TB breakdown protocol.

PVS involvement in breakdown discussions could be formalised through data-sharing agreements and governance protocols – BCVA would support that aim.

2. GOVERNANCE & LOCAL OWNERSHIP

BCVA continues to support transparent governance of bTB control at national and local levels, including:

- active participation in new bovine TB strategic boards and the *Bovine TB Partnership*.
- extension of local TBEG (TB Eradication Expert Groups) responsibilities to provide *real-time*, local governance of TB responses.
- piloting project models such as governance frameworks emerging from Pembrokeshire TB control initiatives (where evidence has shown that local structures have enhanced engagement and accountability).
- Clusters of disease should allow for local discussion and ownership, with an ‘all the tools in the box’ approach with close collaboration between PVSs and APHA field staff.

LOOKING AHEAD...

- Improved collaboration, so that the PVS and the APHA case vet meet and discuss the best approach with all new breakdown farms at the point of TB disclosure and all persistent breakdowns.

3. VACCINATION, SURVEILLANCE AND TESTING

BCVA supports accelerated deployment of a cattle TB vaccine coupled with DIVA testing. UK field trials are now in Phase 3 with broader commercial farm participation planned to complete in 2026. Because vaccination can be rolled out in limited areas even with no DIVA, BCVA would encourage this approach to both ensure a secure steady supply for future wider roll out, and to protect edge area and/or slow spread. In the event that DIVA doesn't come up to standards, we will advocate for mitigation, allowing wider vaccination.

Progress in diagnostics is vital to improve detection sensitivity beyond the standard SICCT test, including:

- gamma interferon;
- ELISA and Enferplex;
- genetic and risk-based diagnostic interpretation with appropriate funding

The updated Godfray evidence review highlights flexible use of enhanced testing and voluntary engagement by farmers in utilising more sensitive protocols, potentially retaining antibody-positive animals under specific herd management plans rather than automatic movement restrictions. More sensitive tests could in future become the norm in circumstances where the aim is to prevent infection entering low risk areas (for example, in post-movement testing).

BCVA would like to see financial incentivisation system in place, where subsidised vaccine is made available or prioritised to farmers who are already implementing reduced risk behaviours.

LOOKING AHEAD...

- We have called for secure veterinary marketing authorisations for a licensed cattle BCG vaccine and *DIVA* test in Great Britain, and we will aim to publish and promote best practice guidance for *DIVA* and advanced testing once in place

4. WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Managing wildlife reservoirs remains necessary, both to break transmission cycles and protect herd health. The current government's strategy is shifting from intensive badger culling to a comprehensive vaccination programme as part of its goal to achieve TB Free status in England by 2038. As farm vets we are required to work within this strategy – which means that that we won't be able to take the 'all the tools in the box' approach we have always advocated for. As such, BCVA will support:

- targeted badger vaccination programmes as the primary wildlife control tool, alongside robust disease surveillance, data capture, and adaptive deployment where epidemiology justifies it.
- wildlife culling to be regularly reviewed as a potential tool, based on available evidence.
- continuation of Test-Vaccinate-Remove (TVR) programme and similar approaches where evidence shows local disease pressure and potential benefit
- enhanced surveillance in wild deer populations, recognising emerging evidence that deer can act as reservoirs and potential spillover hosts. These programmes should include risk modelling, with culling where it is an option.

BCVA supports all approaches to wildlife disease management that is informed by strong science and adaptive evaluation.

LOOKING AHEAD...

- Call on Defra to establish coordinated deer TB surveillance pilots by 2027 with annual reporting.
- Expand badger vaccination coverage with annual targets for delivery and performance evaluation by 2028.

5. BIOSECURITY & FARMER ENGAGEMENT

BCVA recognises the effectiveness of the TB Advisory Service (TBAS) and CHECS TB Entry Level Membership in engaging farmers with risk reduction tools. Practical biosecurity actions that demonstrably reduce risk should be:

- clearly communicated and *rewarded* through recognition, market incentives, and potentially risk-based testing intervals.
- embedded in herd health plans delivered by PVS/BATVAs
- supported by economic analysis to demonstrate return on investment.

BCVA encourages the use of behavioural science to understand and overcome barriers to farmer engagement with biosecurity measures. We would support compensation payments as a tool to encourage biosecurity improvements - conditional on demonstrable biosecurity standards (this is aligned with proposals from the National Beef Association).

LOOKING AHEAD...

- Increase CHECS TB-accredited farms year on year.
- Monitor adoption of key biosecurity practices and correlate with herd incidence annually.

6. CATTLE MOVEMENT RISK MANAGEMENT

Managing movement risk is central to limiting spread and BCVA agrees with Defra that much more could be done to aid the decision making of those at risk of bringing undetected infection into their herds. Whilst ultimate accountability for responsible cattle movements lies with the cattle owner, the role of the PVS is instrumental in engaging and educating industry with regards to best practice. BCVA advocates:

- risk-based pre-movement and post-movement testing protocols around the use of risk scores for each farm that are readily available and can aid purchasing decisions. This needs to incorporate Livestock Information Programme (LIS) to allow the dissemination of information to markets in real time.
- integration of LIS data to flag high-risk animals or farms
- informed trading decisions supported by transparent health data.

Movement controls should balance disease mitigation with business needs, while formally recognising that very high-risk herds face recurrent bovine tuberculosis and require enhanced, proportionate controls based on risk assessment. BCVA calls for a comprehensive review of isolation and biosecure units to ensure regulatory and practical requirements are reasonable and achievable. This will support a controlled pathway for managing high-risk animals, which should be designated for slaughter rather than breeding. The Livestock Information System should be used to support monitoring, compliance, and risk management.

LOOKING AHEAD...

- By 2027, work with stakeholders to embed LIS-enabled risk flags into routine PVS decision-making tools.
- Work with stakeholders to evaluate impact of premovement testing protocols on herd incidence yearly.

7. TRAINING

Robust training infrastructure underpins effective TB control – training to support the knowledge and understanding of bTB for farm vets and technicians, and training that can be shared with farm clients. BCVA will:

- aim to expand BATVA training nationwide, to include ATs to increase understanding across the farm vet team and encourage client engagement
- encourage the inclusion of bTB TBAS/CHECS/Biosecurity modules within veterinary undergraduate and postgraduate programmes
- position TB control as a career-building opportunity for new graduates, with structured mentorship, rotation opportunities, and on-farm engagement.

LOOKING AHEAD...

- Encourage practices to focus on developing in-house expertise within the team to improve local TB control
- Engage in an active programme of promotion of BTAVA training for new graduates – this will include updating BATVA training as and when policy changes – and ensuring the PVS stays at the fore-front of disease control on their clients farms.
- All OV's to be BATVA trained as part of their OV accreditation.

CONCLUSION – A PATHWAY TO IMPACT

Bovine TB will remain a significant livestock health challenge for some time, but there is momentum for change. Advances in diagnostics, vaccination, wildlife management, governance, biosecurity and farmer–vet engagement create strong opportunities to accelerate progress towards eradication, through evidence-based action.

As farm vets, we bring valuable, real-world experience from working closely with our clients. BCVA recognises that alignment across government, industry and stakeholders is needed to manage, reduce and ultimately eradicate bTB and that collaboration is essential.

BCVA will always be committed to a science and evidence-led approach to managing disease on farms, and so while we recognise that policy decisions are made within wider political considerations, we believe that the strongest and most sustainable progress on bTB control is achieved when measures are guided primarily by robust scientific evidence and veterinary expertise. Importantly we believe that this is most effective when adapted and applied locally through collaborative partnerships. We will continue to work constructively with the government of the day to support the most effective possible control of bovine TB, within the legislative framework.

While there is still much to learn about bTB transmission and control, BCVA champions an environment where innovation and research are actively encouraged and properly invested in. This includes biosecurity improvements, testing approaches, wildlife management and vaccination protocols to inform best practice. Crucially, once evidence is established, policies must be flexible enough to enable timely implementation.

BCVA fully acknowledges the scale of the challenge bTB presents. However, there is genuine reason for optimism. With increased engagement and collective effort, we have much to gain and we remain determined to play a leading role in driving a focused, coordinated approach to reducing disease levels.

BCVA stands firmly for:

- empowering and supporting farm vets with tools, data, and confidence
- ensuring control measures are commensurate with animal welfare, while protecting human welfare and the mental health of vets and farmers promoting measurable outcomes that reflect action and progress
- fostering collaborative governance across sectors.

With these principles, we can inspire momentum and deliver real change on farms and across the broader bovine TB landscape.

OUTCOMES FROM THIS POLICY REVIEW

The situation around bTB is a dynamic one, and we need valued this opportunity to refresh our policy. As a profession, vets can't control the legislative environment within which we work – so 'controlling the controllable' remains central to our conversation with our farm clients. What doesn't change and is a constant and significant challenge for vets and farmers is the mental load and toll it takes. The clinical impact on herds, the financial impact on farms is devastating, and so is the mental health implications for those who see that impact.

As a result of this policy refresh, BCVA is leading a collaborative approach with our colleagues at Vetlife and the Farming Community Network, to plan a practical and valuable resource to support both the veterinary profession and farmers. The aim is to announce this at our Congress in Telford in 2026.