

LETTERS

Badger TB in perspective

Sir,

Given the confusion surrounding the current debate over the Krebs/Bourne scientific badger cull in relation to controlling bovine TB in cattle, it is perhaps worth pointing out that badger culls have in fact to more than 99 per cent extent ended.

Badger culls will hence involve well under 1 per cent – both of the country, a mere 200km², and some 1000 cattle herds out of 130 000 nationally. Despite the emotive debate over the new cull, it ought to be seen as a political smokescreen of spectacular irrelevance. Lack of financial and manpower resources mean a phasing in of triplet sample squares and of the three cull/no cull strategies, which, coupled with farmer and conservation non-cooperation will render any results supposedly due in 5 years time either incomprehensible or inconclusive. A phased in path to a 100 per cent end to culls as predicted by then Shadow Agriculture spokesman Elliot Morley 2 years ago.

Meanwhile, cattle TB is already up 45 per cent on last year, and the real answers are already in place albeit in embryonic form: trialling of better blood or DNA cattle tests; some video-auctioning avoiding stress and exposure to disease of normal auction markets; and the computerized cattle passport scheme, which ironically does not incorporate TB test history yet.

The Ministry now admit after 27 years that they don't know if, how, or to what extent badgers might realistically give cattle a respiratory lung infection. It is sad that a new 5-year 'scientific' badger cull (which will cost a guesstimated £27 million) is deemed politically necessary to rediscover what the Dunnet review (1986) found a dozen years ago: badger culls are a waste of money, and irrelevant to bovine TB which has been a bovine problem all along.

*M Hancox
Stroud
Gloucestershire, UK*