



Ein cyf/Our ref LG/WQ 81639

Russell George
Member Senedd (Montgomeryshire)

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14 December 2020

Dear Russell

Russell George (Montgomeryshire): Will the Minister explain why cows are slaughtered every year following a bovine TB test even though a significant proportion of these are clear from TB when killed?

Lesley Griffiths: The UK like many countries in Europe and the rest of the world operates a control and eradication policy for bovine TB, which involves culling test positive animals with compensation and restricting herd movements, when a positive animal has been identified.

The TB skin test as either a single bovine test, or a comparative test, has been used for many decades across the world as the main surveillance and control test in recognised TB control and eradication programmes. In the UK, we use it as a comparative test, which at standard interpretation, according to studies, has a likelihood of identifying an uninfected animal as infected on 1 occasion for every 5000 uninfected animals tested.

A bovine TB lesion in an animal, starts off as a diffuse congregation of cells, only visible microscopically, which then grows to a lesion visible to the naked eye. The speed of growth of such a lesion and the factors affecting that speed of growth are currently unknown. Studies have revealed that, if a carcass is examined meticulously, lesions can be found in the lungs of some animals of < 1cm in size. Abattoir examination of carcasses may not detect very small lesions and will not detect lesions invisible to the naked eye.

There is a much higher chance of confirming the presence of the organism when lesions can be seen, as the lesions themselves have at their core cells containing the mycobacterial organism responsible for bovine TB. For bovine TB, a lack of visible lesions at post-mortem examination and failure to culture the organism appear poor indicators that the organism is absent in the carcase and was not present in the live animal.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'L'.

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs