

Hello, I hope you are all well as we approach summer! For this month's newsletter I would like to discuss a topic that relates to what is probably the most asked question when I'm on farm, "Don't you vets get bored of all this testing?!" Of course, this is in relation to TB testing and the busy schedule that it demands.

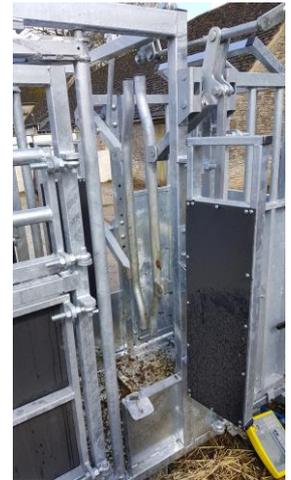
Bovine TB is probably the biggest issue currently facing the cattle farming industry and the single intradermal comparative skin test (SICCT) has been the main method of monitoring for disease since long before I was born (not to rub it in!). Without getting too political it is with small relief we are now seeing that other avenues are being explored for the control and monitoring of TB including the development and use of more accurate testing protocols that can potentially identify those cows unresponsive to the SICCT. However, for the time being this test is still our primary monitoring tool.

Answering the question of how we as your vets feel about TB testing is one that we could all talk for hours on and I hope to give you **my personal answer** (I'll do my best to stay within the newsletter word count!)

Performing the test itself can either be very straight forward or very tricky and for me this is down to three main criteria:

- cattle handling system and preparation
- staffing/staff behaviour towards livestock
- cattle temperament (often linked to staff behaviour)

Bea wrote a newsletter in 2015 that discussed handling systems and covered what is more agreeable for testing. As you know all, vets have different opinions but broadly speaking most would say for restraining the cow to perform the test we would prefer a scissor yoke and a sliding back gate/rotating rump bar with a crush that has bars/adjustable panels for neck access e.g. IAE Chieftain.



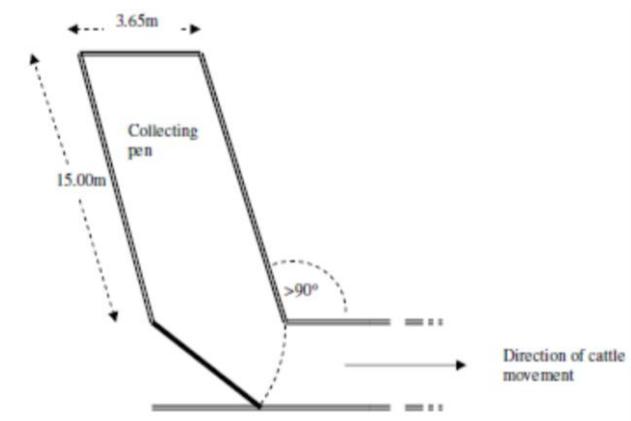
The scissor yoke is quiet and allows for daylight to be seen beyond the crush which greatly helps cow flow (unlike most self-locking head yokes) and, when operated correctly, can safely stop even the most fractious of animals (unlike the Bateman classic crush yokes). That said, all systems are different and for me the Bateman classic crushes, although generally ancient, are sufficient as long as there is an available member of staff to be on the front door.

Pushing cattle through to the crush/yoke can be extremely dangerous to both staff and the cows. Designing a collecting pen and race system that minimises the risk to all whilst promoting steady cow flow can be challenging however; it could mean testing 30 to 50 animals in 45 minutes rather than 5 hours (it does happen!)

Not overcrowding the collecting pen: the pen should only be half full (8-10 adult cows max). When cattle are squashed together the less dominant animals can't perceive an 'escape' route and panic, greatly reducing the compliance of the group as a whole to move down the race.



Angling the collecting pen to the race dramatically helps cow flow - don't angle both sides though.



Rectangular pens are common, however curved races and circular forcing pens have been shown to reduce cattle moving time by 50% as they prevent crowding in corners and cattle will more willingly go down a race that makes them feel as if they are going back on themselves or 'to safety'.



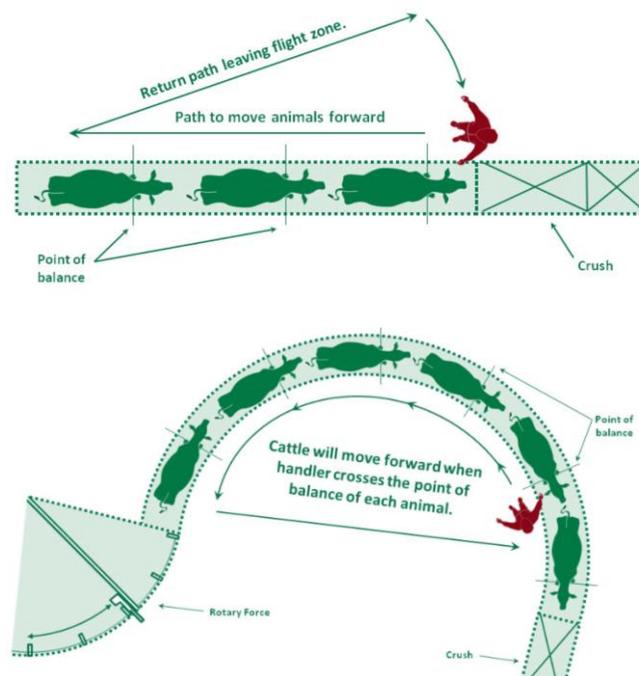
Note the width and height of the race above - the race should be 4cm wider than the largest animal with inserts/adjustable sections for youngstock. Height should be 1.52m for British breeds and 1.75m for continentals. If angling the race it is essential for flow that the cattle can each see 2 cow lengths in front of them.

Not having enough staff to help with a test can be very frustrating for all involved - whether it is not enough people to help move cattle or to assist the vet with sheets etc. Different systems require different numbers of staff however it is important to plan this accordingly before a test and note that no matter how many people you have, they won't make up for a poor handling system.

The way staff interact with the cattle and others can be a huge factor as to whether a test goes well or not, and it is important to say also that this point applies to the vets doing the test. We have a responsibility to understand your plans and contribute to the best of our ability to a smooth and efficient test.

We all know that cow temperament is hugely variable and sometimes an animal behaving dangerously is unavoidable. In many cases where cattle become unacceptably dangerous it is a direct result of poor handling. That is often seen as the misuse of a stick/piece of blue pipe or the behaviour of handlers being too unpredictable. This can be seen when inexperienced individuals are brought in to help without proper training but also from more experienced staff. In my opinion, and after talking to many of you for this newsletter, patience with the cattle is the number one priority and often taking an extra few minutes with a group of stressed animals will massively help the overall efficiency, speed and safety of a test. Handling cattle quietly and predictably is always better, both for the current situation and as an investment in the future behaviour of the cattle.

All staff involved with a test should be familiar with the principles of cow 'flight zones' and how they can vary between individuals and the 'point of balance' for moving animals backwards or forwards.



Bovine TB presents many challenges but with the implementation of new strategies, including alternative tests that improve the likelihood of identifying infected individuals and coordinated control of wildlife reservoirs of disease, there is promising evidence that we can work towards better control and eventual eradication of TB.

That said those two alone will not be enough to achieve the holy grail of eradicating TB or even controlling it.

Biosecurity is a term that is thrown around at various meetings and for many, including me, it doesn't exactly grip you as an exciting topic of discussion. However, for farmers and vets, practising good biosecurity is one of the most important and valuable contributions we can make to combat TB - If not implemented correctly, poor biosecurity is one of the main contributors to the spread of TB.

Foot dips for visitors and cleaning/disinfection of machinery are the first things that spring to mind when discussing this topic. But the subject also encompasses much more than that including how you use slurry and whether or not you allow others to spread slurry on your land, stocking density in sheds/fields, how you give animals supplementary feed etc. The topic is huge and often daunting but with some small changes you can make significant progress in making your farm more bio secure.

We are always happy to sit down at the practice or on farm to discuss what measures you could implement to help reduce the risk of TB to your stock. Below are some useful links to guides on how to implement biosecurity measures:

www.tbhub.co.uk/biosecurity/biosecurity-factsheets/

www.tbknowledgeexchange.co.uk

****Just a reminder****

You can order medicines on our text line

07860026331

or by email on

farm@georgevetgroup.co.uk

New Worming Product



A new worming product called Taurador has recently been launched. A pour-on product for cattle it contains Doramectin (like in Dectomax Pour On) which kills a wide range of gut worms, lung worm, mange mites and lice, with a longer persistence than straight ivermectins. We are now stocking this in our shop, so give Bridget or one of the vets a call if you are interested!



And finally, many of you may have already heard (especially if you've seen me) The George Vets men's relay team were triumphant for the second year in a row at this year's World Woolsack Championships held in Tetbury! We were getting sprayed with cider while this shot was taken which might explain Will's uncomfortable looking expression!

All the best,

Ben

