

DILEMMA: IS IT TIME TO STOP CULLING BADGERS IN ENGLAND?

THE DILEMMA



Since 2013, badgers have been allowed to be killed in England as part of a scheme to get rid of a deadly cattle disease called bovine tuberculosis (TB), which badgers can spread to cows.

In March of this year, the UK Government announced it would begin to phase out the badger culling programme in the next few years. But in September, they actually extended the cull to 11 new areas. They insist they do still plan to stop culls, but not any time soon.

Most farmers back the Government's scheme, but conservation groups and scientists are outraged at

the decision. They say culling is cruel, ineffective, and causes some badgers to suffer great pain. The Government and some farmers say it is essential to prevent the spread of the highly infectious bovine TB among cattle.

The cull scheme began as a trial in Gloucestershire and Somerset seven years ago. Last year, Boris Johnson's Government increased its badger cull programme to 11 new areas in England. Now, another 11 have been added, including parts of Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. It means that more than 60,000 badgers could be killed this autumn in England.

There are now more than 40 areas of the country where badgers are allowed to be killed, from Cornwall in the south to Cumbria in the north. Last year, about 35,000 badgers were killed, but the Badger Trust said a Government document they had seen showed plans to cull up to 64,500 this year.

But the facts don't back up the Government and farmers' argument. Confirmed cases of bovine TB in the Gloucestershire culling zone rose by 130% in 2018 compared with the previous year. The badgers



Protesters against the badger cull

are killed at random, so most of those killed in the cull will likely be healthy and without bovine TB. A panel of experts appointed by Defra (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), the Government department responsible for farming, was set up to review the effectiveness, humaneness and safety of the 2013 culls.

The panel said the culls were "ineffective" and "inhumane" in 2013, with no significant improvement the following year. But the cull continues and is being expanded, even though a vaccine is thought to be the best way of beating bovine TB. In July, the Government said trials of cattle vaccines had started in England and Wales and would be held over the next five years.

So is it finally time to cancel the cull?



OPINIONS

"No-one wants to continue the cull of a protected species indefinitely. That is why we are accelerating other elements of our strategy, including vaccination and improved testing, so that we can eradicate [get rid of] this... disease and start to phase out badger culling in England."

– George Eustice, Farming Minister

"The decision to expand the badger cull is a huge betrayal of public trust by the Government."

– Dominic Dyer, the chief executive of the Badger Trust



These setts are made up of tunnels and chambers – some of them are hundreds of years old.

Badgers infected with bovine TB usually do not show any sign of infection and can survive for many years. Most of those that are culled are shot by farmers.

A badger is about to be vaccinated and then released in the wild



Only **149 (0.6%)** of the total **35,034** badgers killed were monitored to check that they were culled humanely.

In **2018**, there were **4,395** new incidents of bovine TB in cattle herds in Britain.

44,656 animals were slaughtered in **2018** due to bovine TB.

Between **1998** and **2007**, a **£50 million** cull trial took place. More than **11,000** badgers were killed in **20 areas** across England.

The trial found that killing badgers disrupted their social groups, leading some of the animals to move away from their habitat and take the disease with them, spreading it further.

BADGER FACTS

Badgers are the UK's largest land predator. They are mammals and can grow up to 1m long from head to tail, weighing as much as 12kg. They live, on average, for 5-8 years. Badgers sleep during the day and look for food at night. They feed mostly on worms and eat at least 200 every single night!

Badgers are social mammals who live together in mixed-sex groups of between four and eight in large underground setts (dens).

FACTS & FIGURES

The cost of cattle slaughtered due to bovine TB is estimated to be around **£50 million** a year.

The UK Government spends about **£70 million** a year in total trying to control bovine TB.

More than **35,000** badgers were killed during the **2019** cull – the highest number on record.

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The cost of killing each badger is estimated to be about **£1,000**.

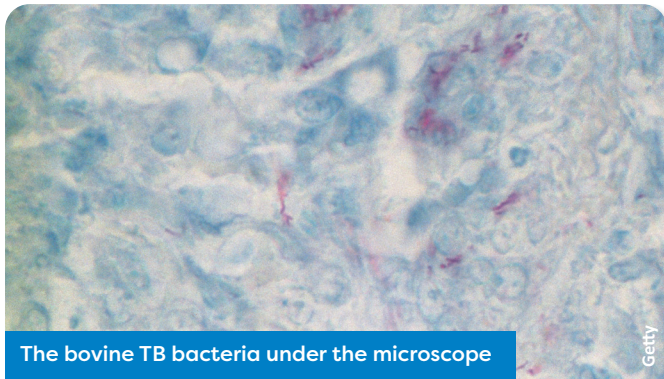
64,000 badgers can legally be culled this year.

The total number of badgers culled since the policy started now stands at **102,349**.

Badger culling has cost more than **£60 million** so far.

83% of badgers culled in trials between **2002** and **2005** were tested and found to not have bovine TB, according to The Wildlife Trusts.

BOVINE TB



The bovine TB bacteria under the microscope

Bovine TB is caused by a bacteria called *Mycobacterium bovis* (M bovis), which is transmitted from cattle to cattle, from badgers to cattle and cattle

to badgers, and also from badger to badger. But the bacteria can also infect and cause bovine TB in deer, goats, pigs, llamas, alpacas, dogs and cats, as well as many other mammals.

It is thought that the bacteria is mainly spread out of the infected animal's body in its breath or in discharges from the nose or mouth, but it can also pass from one infected animal to another through skin injuries, or in urine, droppings and sputum (saliva and mucus).

The symptoms of the disease take a long time to show even though an animal is infectious. They include coughing, weakness and loss of weight. The disease is incurable. The risk of humans catching TB from cattle and badgers is very, very low.

Any cattle that are found to carry the disease during tests are slaughtered. This means that bovine TB can be a financial disaster: according to Government figures, it is estimated that a bovine TB outbreak on a farm costs, on average, £34,000, with roughly £20,000 of that cost paid by the Government and £14,000 by the farmer.

EXPERTS: CULLS DON'T WORK

Last year, the Government asked a professor at Oxford University, Charles Godfray, to lead a study into the bovine TB crisis in England. The Godfray Review said that it was wrong to blame badgers as the main cause of the outbreaks. Instead, the review says frequent trading of cattle and bad practices on farms, such as insecure fencing, are more to blame. The review also found that the test for bovine TB in cattle wasn't good enough, meaning many animals were moved around



the country despite being ill. The Godfray Review also said that TB levels in cattle were not falling.

Meanwhile, a former adviser to the Government has said that almost 10,000 badgers are likely to have suffered "immense pain" in culls. Professor Randal Munro has said he thinks the policy is causing "huge suffering" and is not reducing cases of bovine TB. The professor's team found that as many as 23% of badgers took more than five minutes to die after they were shot.



The Government closed down the Professor's study team against the scientists' wishes in 2014. One of the team, Professor Timothy Coulson, said at the time that the Government was ignoring the concerns of the scientists. He told the BBC that the culls make it look as if the Government is trying to solve the spread of bovine TB. Professor Coulson said there is no evidence culling works.

FARMERS' STRUGGLE

Hundreds of thousands of cows in Britain have been slaughtered due to bovine TB since 2008. The disease causes farmers huge and expensive problems. One survey of farmers found that 20% of those interviewed admitted that they were either 'panicked' or 'devastated' by the news of a new outbreak, and a further 50% were 'upset' or 'worried'. The study also found that many farmers were suffering financial problems, including a reduction in sales of beef and milk as a result of culled cows.

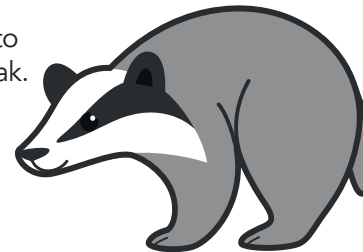


AN ENGLISH PROBLEM

Many countries do not have any bovine TB or have small outbreaks that they can control each year. From January 2017 to June 2018, 82 out of 144 countries surveyed reported having bovine TB in cattle.



But the scale of the bovine TB epidemic in England is far worse than in any other European country. The Government started the first trial cull in 2013 after the European Union (EU) said the UK had to do more to tackle bovine TB. The Government claimed the cull was a response to EU "threats", in order to try to get control of the outbreak. But that was seven years ago, and the cull hasn't improved the situation. The EU has not banned British cattle.



OTHER CULLS

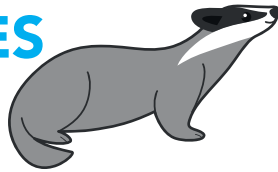
The idea of culling one animal to prevent disease in another is controversial. Until recently, gamekeepers and the people who run grouse moors in Scotland were allowed to cull mountain hares. As many as 25,000 hares were shot each year because, according to gamekeepers and moor managers, they carry ticks and diseases which can harm young red grouse, and they eat heather, shrubs and saplings. But Scottish politicians rejected this and said that there was no scientific justification for killing them.

A mountain hare in Scotland



The cull was brought to an end earlier this year, when the Scottish parliament voted to give mountain hares protection. The law makes it an offence to intentionally kill or injure the hare without a special licence. Around the same time, Scotland banned the killing of seals by salmon farmers. They said that seals cost them 500,000 salmon a year in Scotland. But now they will have to use other protective measures, such as special sounds that scare off the seals, instead.

ALTERNATIVES TO A CULL



A VACCINE FOR BADGERS



One alternative option to a cull is to use vaccines to prevent the spread of the disease. A vaccine is a substance that stops an animal (or a human) from catching a disease. After years of refusing to introduce vaccines, a few years ago, the Government started rolling out a vaccine against bovine TB for badgers. It is called a BCG, and it costs several hundred pounds to vaccinate a single badger with it. The Badger Trust estimates it only costs £200, but this figure is disputed by the Government's analysis. Vaccinations take a lot of time to administer, and there are currently hundreds of volunteers helping to deliver them.



A VACCINE FOR CATTLE



Even more useful would be a vaccine that protects the cattle themselves from infection. Trials for a new vaccine have begun in England and Wales, with the hope of finding a vaccine in the next five years. Before, tests for the disease could not tell the difference between vaccinated animals and those that had bovine TB. Now, a test has been developed that can tell the difference, and will be used alongside a vaccine in trials.



IMPROVED BIOSECURITY



Biosecurity is another way of saying "the safety, cleanliness and security of the farm". Some studies have shown that bovine TB has spread in the pastures on farmland, as well as around farm buildings. More measures could be taken to prevent the disease being transmitted, such as: testing all new animals before they are brought onto the farm; keeping badgers away from stored cattle feed; and maintaining regular cleaning processes.



YES, IT'S TIME TO STOP THE BADGER CULL



1. IT'S CRUEL – There is no way of knowing if the culled badgers are infected with TB or not before they are killed, so thousands of innocent, healthy badgers are dying. Some of these die slowly and painfully. All of them die needlessly.

2. IT'S INEFFECTIVE – Even if infected badgers are killed, there is no scientific evidence that the cull is reducing bovine TB or making cattle any safer. The Government is extending the cull just to keep farmers happy and to make it look like they are taking action.

3. THERE ARE OTHER, BETTER WAYS – Vaccinations are cheaper and a solid way of preventing the spread of bovine TB. Biosecurity and improved cattle testing are useful methods that can help contain this disease. Farmers should be expected to make their farms and herds as safe as possible.



NO, THE BADGER CULL SHOULD CONTINUE



1. THE COST TO FARMING IS HUGE –

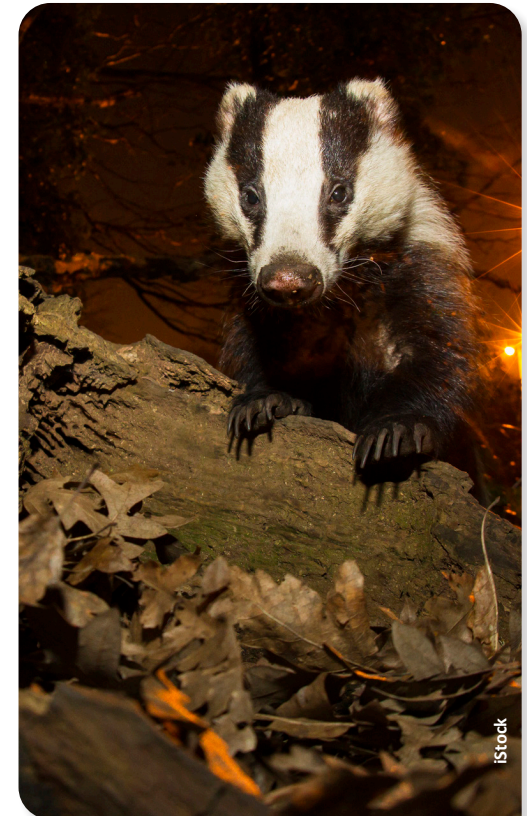
Dealing with bovine TB has cost farmers tens of millions. It's expensive and is causing great distress. If the disease is allowed to continue spreading, many more expensive cattle will be killed and farmers put out of business.

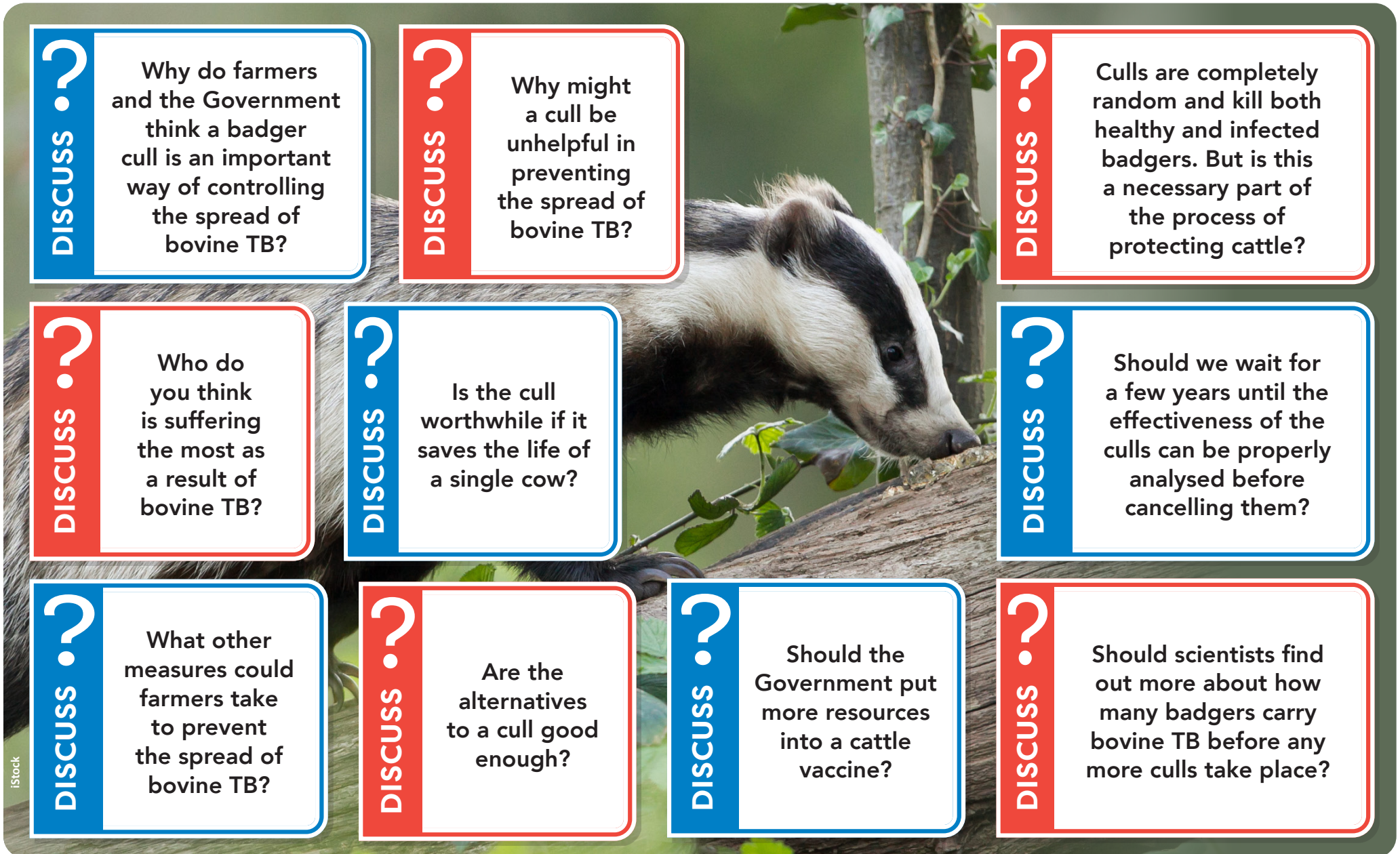
2. THE DISEASE CAUSES SUFFERING AND SLAUGHTER –

A badger cull is a tough but necessary response to the spread of bovine TB, which is an incurable infection that leads to a horrific illness and death in cattle.

3. IT ISN'T FOREVER –

The Government has said it plans to phase out the badger cull, and that it isn't the only way of combating bovine TB. We won't know for sure how effective the cull is for a few years, but until then it must continue, as it is one of several methods to deal with the crisis.





DISCUSS

Why do farmers and the Government think a badger cull is an important way of controlling the spread of bovine TB?

DISCUSS

Why might a cull be unhelpful in preventing the spread of bovine TB?

DISCUSS

Culls are completely random and kill both healthy and infected badgers. But is this a necessary part of the process of protecting cattle?

DISCUSS

Who do you think is suffering the most as a result of bovine TB?

DISCUSS

Is the cull worthwhile if it saves the life of a single cow?

DISCUSS

Should we wait for a few years until the effectiveness of the culls can be properly analysed before cancelling them?

DISCUSS

What other measures could farmers take to prevent the spread of bovine TB?

DISCUSS

Are the alternatives to a cull good enough?

DISCUSS

Should the Government put more resources into a cattle vaccine?

DISCUSS

Should scientists find out more about how many badgers carry bovine TB before any more culls take place?