



Bovine tuberculosis eradication: Opinions from the ground up

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Introduction

The 'EU strategy is not intended primarily to support control programmes but is focused on the achievement of the total eradication of bovine TB' (European Commission, 2013).

A bovine tuberculosis (bTB) eradication programme began in Northern Ireland in 1959 (Robinson, 2015).

Considerable success in reducing the incidence of bTB the early years of the programme offered great hope of eradication, but there remains a significant disease problem in the region.

Given this disconnect between aspiration and achievement, what are the opinions of stakeholders regarding the prospects of eradication of bTB in Northern Ireland?



Interview extracts

No end in sight?

"It's been going on for a lifetime, and still hasn't resolved. Maybe that's why you're doing this [research] – there's no resolution to it!" (A03, dairy farmer)

"We're hungry to see it eradicated, but it has got to the stage where we're resigned that this TB testing and slaughtering of animals just has to continue." (A17, private vet)

Should we give up?

"I'd hate to think it was impossible. We live in a scientific age. I think it probably requires more resource, more thought." (A58, dairy farmer)

"I don't think we will ever eradicate it, but we could do an awful lot better." (A41, state vet)

"If they have done that in other countries, I don't see why we couldn't do it here." (A60, private vet)

What needs to change?

"Hopelessness is doing what you've always done, expecting different results. And for the last umpteen years we've been doing the same thing, and hoping for different results." (A58, dairy farmer)

"Unless you have the vision that you want to eradicate it, you're not going to - you have to have that vision, and everybody bought into that vision, to do it." (A45, state vet)

"The future? It would be nice to have a crystal ball, it really would. I don't see why we can't eradicate it if the science improved." (A47, state vet)

For reflection ...

"Eradication programmes have a high risk of failure, and a high degree of difficulty." (Closser, 2012: 385).

"The sustainability of control versus the extended benefits of eradication should be a key research focus." (Klepac et al., 2013: 10)

Qualitative methods

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with 86 farmers, vets and other agricultural industry stakeholders in Northern Ireland. Interviews were fully transcribed and then coded and analyzed around the theme of bTB eradication.

References

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Acknowledgements

This study was funded at Durham University by a Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (NI) Postgraduate Studentship as part of the DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy, and the support is gratefully acknowledged.

