

# Subsidising cattle, inspecting farmers, controlling disease: the socioeconomic impact of the CAP



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## Introduction

State support of agricultural production through subsidies is a feature of agricultural economies in countries around the world.

In Europe, the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were formed as part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 before being introduced in 1962, and many farmers within the European Union (EU) are subsidised through the support mechanisms of the CAP.

With subsidy payments come government inspections to ensure compliance with EU legislation, and some farmers may resist what they see as State interference in their farming practices and businesses.

## Key question

Do CAP inspections and enforcement of EU legislation affect government efforts to ensure farmer co-operation in disease programmes such as bovine tuberculosis (bTB) eradication?



## Methods

Eighty-six farmers, vets and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland were interviewed about the bTB eradication programme and factors affecting its success.

The interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and analysed thematically using a grounded theory approach.

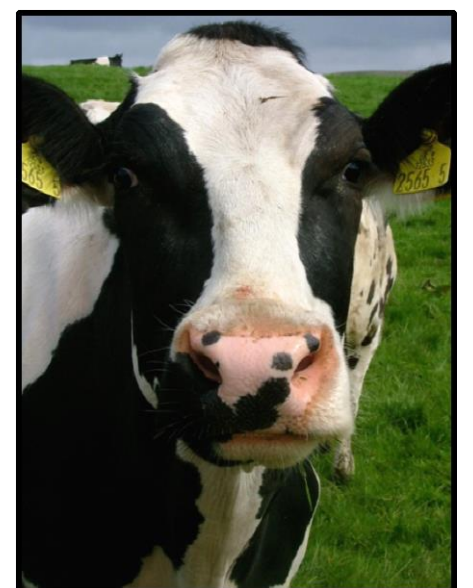
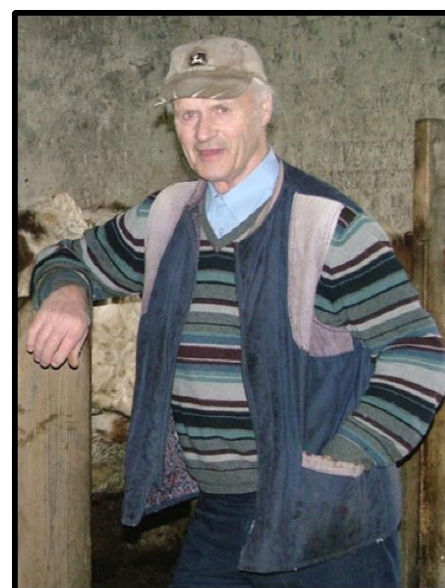
## Results

Interviewees spoke of how the relationship between the government and farmers had been negatively affected by the subsidy cross-compliance inspections. For example:

'One of the unfortunate consequences of the move to Single Farm Payment and cross-compliance is now an almighty fear [of the Department of Agriculture].' (Int A58, dairy farmer)

'We've got the agricultural police service - the Department - on top of us all the time, so that's the worst thing about farming.' (Int A28, dairy farmer)

'I don't like how the Department views the farmer - they are very intransigent. That just isn't conducive to [good working] relationships - relationships that are important - because if you are talking about trying to eradicate disease ... everybody has a part to play, and it should be a team effort.' (Int A23, dairy farmer)



## Discussion

The perceived downside to receiving subsidy payments was the system of regulatory control which had been built by the State and the EU to ensure compliance with rules and the prevention of fraud.

The inspection system and fear of financial penalties has become all-encompassing in the lives of many farmers, and has affected the attitude of farmers towards the government and its efforts to eradicate bTB in NI.

This harms the partnership approach and co-operation the government seeks to foster with farmers in disease control. As one State official stated:

'You can have all the controls that you know will do it, but unless you have the hearts and minds of the people who are actually engaged in it, you won't be able to do it.' (Int A61, State vet)

## Conclusion

CAP subsidies to cattle farmers have indirectly led to unintended and far-reaching consequences for disease control efforts in Northern Ireland which need to be addressed.

These findings emphasize the need for socioeconomic analyses of disease which accept the importance of social factors in national and international efforts to eradicate diseases such as bTB (Robinson, 2015).

### Acknowledgements

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### References

Robinson, P.A. (2015) A history of bovine tuberculosis eradication policy in Northern Ireland. *Epidemiology & Infection*, 143, 3182-3195