

RESPONSE TO DAERA CONSULTATION ON BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS ERADICATION STRATEGY

AgriSearch (The Northern Ireland Agricultural Research and Development Council) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation on DAERA's proposed implementation and next steps of the bTB eradication strategy for Northern Ireland.

AgriSearch was formed in 1997 to provide a mechanism through which beef, dairy and sheep farmers could have direct involvement in agricultural focused research. Funds contributed to AgriSearch are used to commission research into the improvement and development of beef, dairy and sheep farming. Our mission is to drive profitability and sustainability, as a trusted conduit of knowledge and innovation based on sound science and widely applied research.

AgriSearch is committed to play its part in increasing the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the Northern Ireland ruminant livestock sector. Bovine Tuberculosis has been and remains a very significant barrier to improving the sustainability of Northern Ireland beef and dairy farms. AgriSearch is at present putting significant resources into identifying new technologies and practices for farmers to reduce their carbon footprint whilst not significantly affecting their economic sustainability.

The present rates of bTB in herds results in the significant loss of productive livestock and the need for many farmers to rear dairy / suckler cow replacements. This has a considerable detrimental effect on methane emissions through enteric fermentation which accounts for around half of the ruminant livestock sectors GHG emissions (on a CO₂e basis).

AgriSearch has also put considerable resources into research and initiatives to improve animal health and the reduction of the use of antimicrobials. Depopulation of herds by bTB often forces farmers who would otherwise maintain closed herds to procure livestock from outside their herd leading to other biosecurity risks.

AgriSearch would therefore urge the Department to do all in its power to tackle the scourge of Bovine Tuberculosis in as expeditious a manner as possible. The ruminant livestock sector will have to meet its first set of interim targets for GHG reduction within the next 5-7 years. Simply put there is no time to waste. Bovine Tuberculosis has been having these detrimental effects on Northern Ireland farming for well over five decades with report after report ending up gathering dust on the shelf. It is imperative that young farmers, the future of our industry, do not face the same challenges of previous generations in relation to bTB.

AgriSearch is committed to the use of sound science to achieve its goals. For any TB eradication strategy to have a hope of success it must be based on science and empirical evidence and not on emotion. We believe that DAERA's proposed option for wildlife intervention is based on sound science and empirical evidence of similar schemes operating in other parts of the British Isles.