

TB IN THE QUANTOCK HERD

March 2012

Last year, for the first time in 20 years of breeding Longhorns, two separate farmers had asked us to keep a bull calf entire for them to buy at weaning to rear on as stock bulls. The two little bulls were duly weaned and at the end of January they were pre-movement tested for TB. Unfortunately one of them was a reactor. He was removed and was positive on post-mortem (PM) examination.

As the two young bulls had been housed separately from the rest of the herd we were able to have the rest of the herd check-tested immediately. We were not hopeful about the outcome because we had heard in the interim that our immediate neighbour had nine reactors. But we were not prepared for the enormity of the result –11 reactors and one inconclusive reactor (IR). The reactors included eight of our 12 cows and our bull, Carreg Gunner. All the cows were due to calve between late February and early April. The IR, one of our only two yearling heifers, was taken as a dangerous contact (DC) and she was the only one that did not have lesions of TB at PM. The bull and two of the cows were so infected that their carcasses were condemned at the slaughterhouse. As many more farmers will already have experienced, these cattle were in excellent condition and there was no visible evidence of disease in the live animals.

We are not optimistic about the coming grazing season. All the local cattle farmers have cases of TB, so our badgers, which have previously been healthy, are now clearly infected. All our cattle are homebred except Gunner, who was purchased in May 2008, and Horton Tiffany, who was purchased as a one month old calf with her dam Horton Lavendar in May 1996. We are on annual testing so we have not introduced infected cattle. Tiffany was born before the August 1996 BSE cut off date and so had to be euthanased on farm. She was carrying her 13th calf.

One ray of hope is that we have six bulling heifers that were away at keep two miles away last year and were clear. They will be returned to that grazing and a new bull will be put with them and fingers will be crossed. But our four remaining cows will have to take their chance with whatever protective fencing we can devise to minimise their exposure to badger excretion. Three of them have calved in the last few days and the last one will do so within 2-3 weeks.

Ian and Lynne Kett, 6 March 2012

UPDATE JULY 2012

We had our 1st 60 day check test on April 10th and that was clear - as expected since the cattle were still housed. The 2nd check test was on 12th June and sadly we have lost another cow, Elspeth, leaving us with three out of the original 12. She went last Thursday 12th July. By coincidence, as Ian was leaving he received a phone call from a BBC reporter asking him for comments on the overturning of the appeal against the badger cull. So he appeared on BBC Points West taking Elspeth to the abattoir and apparently also on BBC Somerset Sound. We still need two more clear tests & so will be under movement restrictions until October at the earliest.

We should like to sincerely thank all those members who wrote, emailed and phoned us after our initial TB breakdown. We were overwhelmed by everyone's kindness, in particular that of Stan Dixon and his business partners who have lent us their bull, Riffhams Burlington.