

From the Goat Veterinary society  
Nick Clayton  
IMPORTANT TO ALL MEMBERS

#### TUBERCULOSIS IN GOATS IN THE UK

As many of you may know, there has been an outbreak of Tuberculosis in goats in the UK.

John Matthews and I met on Wednesday July 16th with a group including representatives from DEFRA policy unit, The Welsh Assembly Government, Animal Health, and the VLA whose senior epidemiologist Richard Clifton-Hadley attended. There was also an observer from the Scottish devolved assembly veterinary department.

Thanks are due to DEFRA for setting up what was a very useful meeting at extremely short notice. The object was to look at what has happened, where we are now, what is being done, and what more we should do in the short term.

The main points from the meeting are:

The outbreak was first discovered in Wales, in an area where M. Bovis is endemic, in a goat post mortemed a few weeks ago. Lesions typical of TB were found, and testing and tracing have been put in hand following the protocol that is standard for cattle.

The herd in question was in the process of being sold up due to retirement at the time the discovery was made, and many of the goats from that herd went to two other herds, from both of which stock had been sold on quite widely.

The necessary tracings are being followed up, but one or two are proving difficult to follow. Most of these are tracings from three particular farms. We cannot of course name them, but who they are seems to be widely known, and if any one has goats which have been in contact with goats from these herds, and has not been approached by the tracing team, they should get in touch with their Animal Health office.

Where tracings have been completed, the herds identified have been tested at the expense of DEFRA. Results officially available are inevitably behind those that are as it were known locally, but out of the first six herds traced and tested, 22 reactors have been found, with 20 showing lesions typical of Tuberculosis. The initial, liquid cultures of these show 17 positive for Mycobacteria. Some of these have now been further examined, and that examination strongly suggests a strain of M. Bovis, but that is NOT as yet a final confirmation.

We expect more information in the next few days.

The nature of the lesions suggests that the strain of TB concerned is aggressive in goats, and the tracings so far completed and followed up demonstrate that the infection has the potential to have spread quite widely.

John and I stressed heavily that as we see it, there is an opportunity with swift action now, to stamp out the disease. We have to accept that in an age when there is a known worryingly high level of infection in wildlife, eradication now is no guarantee of long term future freedom, but in the current situation, we feel that it is essential to have a go.

There is no TB in goats legislation to match that applying to TB in cattle. That means that for many types of goat, there is no obligation on DEFRA to foot the bill for testing, and no compensation is payable for reactors slaughtered. However as the disease is notifiable, it has to be reported to DEFRA, and they will then take the necessary action for the general good.

Tracing contacts is a difficult, expensive, and time consuming exercise, and may not catch up with every possible contact. It is very difficult to know just how much contact is needed for the disease to spread. Certainly a few days at a major show, in contact with infected animals, has proved quite sufficient.

At least one show has decided only to allow goats which have been tested for TB to be exhibited this year, and another has been cancelled.

We all agree that in the current situation it would be best practice for show authorities to insist that only goats recently tested for TB should be exhibited. It would equally be best practice for exhibitors to have their goats tested before being taken to a show, or before being sold.

We must stress that the nature of the disease means that not every possibly infected animal will be picked up at any one test, so a single test minimises risk, but does not eliminate it. If you are buying stock, it is wise to have them tested pre purchase. It would be wiser still to isolate them, and test them again a few weeks later, before mixing them with your own stock. That reduces risk from being minimised, to making introduction of disease reasonably unlikely, BUT, it is still not a GUARANTEE. It is however the best you can reasonably do.

All the goats involved to date have come from high class showing herds. So far, no tracings have been made other than to herds which are either kept for showing, or as pets, but we recognise that others may be at risk. Any goats which DIE or are CULLED, and have RESPIRATORY disease, should be submitted to the VLA for post mortem. There will be no charge if the goat is in a herd which has been tested as a contact

Testing at the request of DEFRA is carried out as a result of a risk assessment based on evaluation of each situation.

John and I have suggested that as tracing is an expensive business, it might be more cost effective for DEFRA to pay on a one off basis for a targetted test on ALL goats which might be at risk. That will require thoughts from higher places.

We do however feel that it is in the common good that all possibly affected goats, and certainly all those who have been at major shows in the last 12 months, should be tested as soon as possible, along with all other members of the herd.

You can request a test through your veterinary surgeon, who would need to be an LVI. For most GVS lay members this will be the case, but not all vets have the right qualification. If you request a test privately, the fee is payable to the veterinary surgeon, as is the established practice with cattle. As with cattle ALL tests have to be submitted to DEFRA with a full test chart.

Tests which are carried out at the request of DEFRA

will for now at least be paid for by them, but that is on a goodwill basis.

There is a possible bone of contention here in that if goats are tested privately, and subsequently turns out to be a "Tracing", you still have to pay privately for the test.

Authorities are also likely to focus on those goatkeepers who produce raw milk for human consumption. Where dairy cattle farmers are given a dispensation to sell unpasteurised milk, extra TB testing, at the expense of the owner, is normally required. Under the dairy hygiene regulations, that is also a requirement for goats whose milk or its products are sold for human consumption without being pasteurised.

However, standing instructions have for some years been that goats were only to be tested when they were on a farm, where cattle had been tested positive. Any goatkeeper selling raw milk or milk product should now have their goats tested as a matter of urgency.

Where people are milking goats at home for their own consumption, and there has been no possible contact with infected stock, there is no increased risk from the current situation, but do not forget that mating has to be classed as a contact. Although TB in goats has only been reported once in the 50 years prior to 2007, there is an increasing possibility as more and more other livestock become infected, that ANY goat could be infected if it has been in possible contact with other livestock at any time. It would therefore be best practice for those drinking raw milk from their own goats to have the occasional TB test carried out.

Again, in both cases TB tests will be authorised automatically, but it is important that they are requested in advance.

So far, there have been no tracings of potentially infected goats into large commercial herds. However we are aware that there is some overlap, with show stock being sold into these herds, often as bucks. If any commercial producers have bought stock from any source which could be a contact, again it is essential that they are tested as a matter of urgency.

Those involved from DEFRA with tracing and testing, have gone out of their way to stress how much they appreciate the cooperation and understanding so far shown them by goatkeepers. With that cooperation, we hope that this outbreak can be knocked out quite rapidly. It will however mean that everyone will have to pull together, and there is bound to be a degree of inconvenience.

The group that met on Wednesday will reconvene when enough information is available to enable us to assess the situation in more depth, and we appreciate that a lot of questions are not answered in this update. However a Q & A sheet is being finalised and will be available very shortly, and the group is establishing its own e mail loop to enable information to be disseminated, and questions to be asked amongst us, with the minimum of delay.

I will keep you informed as and when possible.

Nick Clayton.