

VETS 'KEY' TO SUCCESS OF NATIONAL BTB VACCINATION

LEADING figures and scientists in badger bovine TB (bTB) vaccination have called for a greater role for vets in rolling out the process.

At an event held by the Badger and Cattle Vaccination Initiative (BACVI) at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), speakers argued for vaccinating the mammals as a key strategy for combating the disease in cattle, and said the use of vets was key to its success.

Gordon McGlone, former chief executive of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, said vets were key in helping badger vaccination businesses operate.

"If you are planning on trying to do this, there is lots of equipment to try to understand and staff to train if you are going to do this in house, but I think of the key [things], and a step that has probably been overlooked, is that the veterinary profession is really important in this whole issue of controlling bTB and TB strategy. Locating a vet who is prepared to do the professional part of managing [vaccination

report by
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programmes] is absolutely critical, and we have to have that," he said.

Listing four action points to help roll out nationwide badger vaccination programmes, Dr McGlone reiterated the importance of vets.

"In terms of planning, we need a cunning plan, we need something strategic. Lots of these little efforts are great, but it would make everyone feel better – the farming community and the volunteers – if they knew they were making a real contribution to something that was directed and had an end point," he said.

"We need to make sure the veterinary profession is fully included – the AHVLA and the private vets – they really have a role to play in this and I would like to see them brought in more closely to that."

Another speaker at the

event, Rosie Woodroffe, a senior research fellow at the ZSL Institute of Zoology, also made a case for the importance of vets in badger vaccination, but as a mediator between farmers and probadger volunteers.

"I think there is massive mistrust between the wildlife sector and the farming sector and the people who could potentially break that are the vets," she said.

"[Farmers] are people who are sufficiently well informed to understand all the nuances of the debate, and there are also people farmers trust. I think a lot of the solution to this lies with the veterinary profession, and anything from the wildlife side that can be done to work with veterinary organisations, I think is going to be key to solving this problem."

Jonathan Statham, BCVA president, welcomed the experts' calls, but warned the BCG badger vaccine cannot tackle bTB alone, as other diseases have not been successfully eradicated from the UK despite there being a vaccine available.

"[BCVA] does feel vets have



Minister Alun Davies witnesses badger vaccination in Wales.

a managing role to play in having that working knowledge underground and working in partnerships with all parties," he said.

"We're always looking for vaccines to be part of the solution in working in large cattle disease control programmes – bovine viral diarrhoea, for example, is a disease we've had around for a long time. There's been a vaccine for 20 years, and unfortunately we haven't actually dealt with that problem with that vaccine.

"We would be very interested to see what work is being done to make sure [badger and cattle] vaccines can deliver what we expect."

A Defra spokesman agreed both the AHVLA and private vets have "a major part to play" in helping to develop a workable badger vaccine as "their expertise is 'indispensable'". However, he warned of logistical issues with the vaccine.

"An injectable badger vaccine is available, but there are practical difficulties that mean it is not a realistic option for dealing with the problem in the short term, and badger vaccination also has no effect on infected animals – they will continue to spread disease," he said.

"We are, however, continuing to invest in research for vaccines – a further £11.7m over the next three years."