

Trading options for farms under TB restrictions

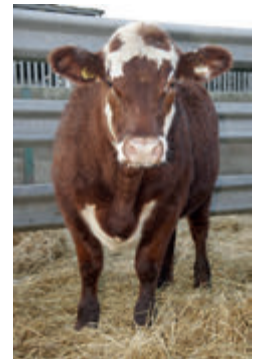
Bovine tuberculosis (bTB) is a serious bovine disease that can be spread directly through respiratory secretions between infected and uninfected animals, or indirectly via contact with the responsible bacteria in sputum, urine or other excretions.

All cattle keepers are required by law to have their animals tested regularly. The time period between tests differs across the country – depending on the incidence of the disease.

If a farm fails these tests, movement restrictions are imposed and further testing is required. This causes problems for farmers with limited facilities to rear and finish cattle.

Approved TB routes to trade

There are three main types of approved routes to sell cattle on holdings with movement restrictions due to TB. Alongside these, farms are able to sell cattle to other farms under the same or higher level of restriction, under licence from AHVLA and following a satisfactory risk assessment.



Approved Finishing Units (AFUs)

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Approved Finishing Units provide an outlet to rear and finish cattle from farms which are under TB restrictions, but do not have the facilities to finish their own stock.

These units can source animals from officially TB-free (OTF) herds, as well as herds under restrictions. Only AFUs located in the annual testing areas of the country can source cattle from restricted herds.

AFUs are set up under licence from the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) and must have an individual County Parish Holding (CPH) number.

If they can offer grazing, they are subject to a 90 day testing regime. Without grazing the unit is exempt from testing.

AFUs do not have OTF status, so cattle moving off them must go direct to slaughter (red market or abattoir) or to another AFU.

These units can be set up to take calves for rearing, as well as store animals for finishing. Clear-tested cattle from herds under restrictions can move onto an AFU under licence within 90 days.

A list of some AFUs can be found on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/bovine-tb/moving-cattle/approved-finishing-units/ (those agreed to have details published)

TB Isolation Units

Farmers under movement restrictions can set up an isolation unit with the agreement of AHVLA on a separate block of land or in a separate building, or on a second holding they control.

TB Isolation Units

These units can be used to move lower risk stock, with the aim of regaining OTF status earlier for these than would be the case if they were kept with the main herd.

Cattle can only move to these units from one holding over a six week period. Once the units are stocked, animals are tested every 60 days until they achieve OTF status after two clear tests. Movement restrictions are then lifted and the animals can be traded freely. From October 2014 isolation units will have to be registered to a separate CPH to the main herd.

Approved Dedicated Markets and Calf Collection Centres (orange markets)

Orange markets are less common across the country than red markets where all animals go for slaughter. These have been specifically designed to provide a more open market for stock from herds under restrictions, than would be possible if sending cattle to a red market, or selling directly to an AFU.

These markets allow farmers to trade cattle from restricted herds that have passed a clear test in the previous 90 days in an open market situation. Buyers can include the owners of AFUs. Animals can also return to the farm of origin under licence.

Some areas of the country operate calf collection centres. These operate under the same guidelines as orange markets. Calves from restricted premises can be sold to AFUs, go directly to slaughter or return to the premises of origin under licence. Calves over six weeks of age, need to have had a clear test in the previous 90 days.

Approved Markets and Calf Collection Centres

Why set up an AFU?

AFUs offer farmers who currently operate conventional rearing and finishing units many advantages in terms of the range of livestock they can source and the degree of red tape they are subject to around TB testing.

In annual testing areas - farmers with licensed AFUs can source from the whole market as they are able to buy clear-tested cattle from TB-restricted holdings.

In the four-yearly testing areas - cattle on AFUs must be fully housed in wildlife-proof buildings and the owners cannot buy from restricted herds. However, these units still have advantages for operators, eg if a TB case is found, in most cases this would not trigger 3km radial testing on surrounding farms, which can help neighbourly relations.

AFUs are not subject to TB-tracing testing, which is a constant demand on operators of finishing units which source cattle from many farms.

AFUs without grazing

- Can source cattle from multiple premises
- Must be wildlife-proof
- Must implement strict biosecurity
- No routine testing required (unless lesions identified in abattoir)
- May be approved in the annual testing area
- There are different requirements in the four-yearly testing area
- The movement of cattle from an AFU directly to another AFU may be allowed under licence (cattle must have had a negative TB test within 90 days preceding their movement)
- After finishing at an AFU, cattle can only leave for slaughter (red market or abattoir)

AFUs with grazing

- Cannot be set up in four-yearly testing areas. Will only be approved in annual testing areas where infected wildlife to cattle is a known disease transmission route
- Can source cattle from multiple premises
- Testing is at 90 day intervals
- Biosecurity must be strict, including having well-defined boundaries
- The movement of cattle from an AFU directly to another AFU may be allowed under licence (cattle must have had a negative TB test within 90 days preceding their movement)
- After finishing at an AFU, cattle can only leave for slaughter (red market or abattoir)

How to establish an AFU

Farmers wishing to set up an AFU need to contact their local AHVLA office for an application form, or download from the Find a form section of the AHVLA website.

On receipt of a completed form, the AHVLA will send a veterinary officer to inspect the proposed AFU. If the vet passes the holding, the AHVLA will send written confirmation of approval and outline the conditions of compliance.

Operators of AFUs can expect at least one inspection a year from the AHVLA to inspect the farm and the movement records.

Cattle moved from TB incidents at other farms are not traced and/or notified to AFUs.

Farmers can stop being an AFU by notifying the AHVLA in writing.

Rules for AFUs

There are some common rules that apply to both **Grazing and Non-grazing AFUs**:

- There must be strict biosecurity and rules for movements of people and equipment between the AFU and any cattle on the farm that are not part of the unit
- Dedicated clothing that can be disinfected must be available to everyone that works in the AFU. Equipment that cannot be disinfected must only be used on the unit
- Manure should be stacked for three weeks on the site of the AFU or at an approved site. Slurry should either be:
 - Stored for six months and then spread a minimum of 10m from the farm boundary or 10m from land grazed by TB-susceptible stock. It is also essential that where slurry is spread on pasture, TB-susceptible stock does not access it for 60 days
 - Spread by injection

Having an AFU creates wider market options for finishers buying cattle within annual testing areas.

Rules for Grazing AFUs

There are several specific conditions that farms need to meet in order to become a **Grazing AFU**:

- The farm must be in an annual testing area where breakdowns of disease have been linked to the wildlife in the area, rather than from purchased cattle



- Boundaries of the unit must be secure, with double fencing used including at road gates
- There must be no opportunity for the cattle from the unit to stray or to have any nose-to-nose contact with any neighbouring cattle (when housed or at grass)
- There must be housing or shelter available for the animals in poor weather conditions
- Stock can have access to watercourses provided they cannot have nose-to-nose contact with stock outside the unit
- TB testing is still carried out in Grazing AFU's:
 - All cattle in the unit must be tested at 90 day intervals. If testing becomes overdue, any general movement licences will be revoked and so may the approval of the unit
 - If TB is found on the AFU, the standard AHVLA process for compensation, removal and post-mortem of reactors applies
 - If a case of TB is found at the slaughterhouse, an immediate check test may be needed, followed by the routine 90 day tests which will be carried out using the 'severe interpretation' level, which is more than the 'standard interpretation' level of test results
 - If reactors are found at the regular 90 day test, then the next 90 day check test will be carried out at the severe interpretation level
 - Reactors will be routinely traced back to their farm of origin. However, if the origin herd has passed two 60 day tests since the movement, then usually no action will be taken

Rules for Non-grazing AFUs

There are several specific conditions that farms need to meet to become a **Non-grazing AFU**:

- Buildings must have adequate room to allow for the growth of cattle within the unit
- The AFU must be wildlife-proof. If it is not possible to adapt the buildings, a wildlife-proof boundary such as electric fencing must be erected
- To be wildlife-proof:
 - Building sides should not be open but be smooth, solid and over 1.5m high
 - Doors should be smooth, solid and a minimum of 1.5m high. Sheets of metal could be added to a five-barred gate to achieve this
 - Gaps under or at the side of doors and walls should be a maximum of 10cm high or wide. They should be protected so they cannot be enlarged by digging or chewing by animals such as vermin or wildlife
 - There must be no drainage of effluent or wash-water from the unit into areas where TB-susceptible stock have access to
 - Wildlife should not have access to any ditches that act as a soak-away for effluent or waste-water. Wire or electrified pig netting connected to the mains can be used to stop this
 - If electric fence is used as a boundary to the AFU, the strands of wire should be at 10, 15, 20 and 30cm above the ground
- There is no requirement to carry out any routine short-interval TB tests in a non-grazing AFU. However, tests may be carried out if a number of slaughterhouse cases are found, or there is a large TB breakdown on a neighbouring farm



Reduce the risk of buying-in TB

Before purchase

Before purchasing any cattle, seriously consider the risk of bringing diseases like TB onto the farm.

Ask for information about the disease history of an animal before purchase, to assess the level of risk and to plan how to manage it when it arrives. Discuss the potential for importing problems from other farms and the best biosecurity measures to take, with a vet.



Ask the seller or auctioneer the following questions:

- **Has the herd ever had a TB-breakdown?**
How long has it been clear for? The date a herd achieved OTF status can be found on the TB10 form, which the previous owner will have.
- **How long has it been since TB test?**
Current advice is animals should react to the test within 60 days of coming into contact with TB. It may be wise to ask the seller to carry out a voluntary pre-movement test. Or isolate the animal on arrival and ask the vet to conduct a post-movement test for additional reassurance.
- **If the animal is coming from an annual testing area, how long has it been since the animal's last pre-movement test?**
It should have been within 60 days. The less time that has passed since the last test, the more relevant the result will be.
If the animal is coming directly from a holding in a four-yearly testing area, and has had a pre-movement test recently, ask more questions about its movement history before then. The date of the last test can be found on the certificate TB52.

At breeding sales, some livestock auctioneers make this information available for potential buyers to see. If it is not displayed, talk to the auctioneer to find out more.

Making an informed and responsible decision at purchase can reduce the risk of introducing TB into a OTF herd.

After purchase

There are additional quarantine measures that should be applied to incoming cattle in relation to TB.

1. Separation

Keeping new animals separate from the herd until they have tested OTF reduces the opportunity for transmission and spread of the disease.

2. Post-movement testing

Before introducing any new animals onto the farm, it is best practice to arrange for a post-movement test, to ensure they are clear of TB and have not developed it since their last test. This testing can be arranged with the farm's own vet.

Post-movement testing is especially recommended for animals moving into herds in low risk areas, where four-yearly cattle testing is carried out.

This is because, due to the length of period between tests it may be a long time before infection is detected, at which point it may have spread from the original source animals.

To safeguard the health of the herd, it is especially important to consider testing new animals which are not going to slaughter within 120 days.



It is illegal to knowingly sell or move an animal that has tested positive for TB to an OTF herd.

However, no test is 100% accurate and a negative test does not guarantee that an animal is free from the disease. This is one of the reasons the surveillance regime requires multiple tests.

Requesting TB information can help farmers make informed purchasing choices, while pre- and post-movement testing increases the chances of keeping it out of previously unaffected herds. However, this does not eliminate the risk completely.

For more information contact:

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