

Alternative Control Herds - Conditions of Operation

Summary

- TB control will be by containment rather than the removal of disease;
- ACHs are permanently non grazing herds;
- No TB testing will be required (apart from in exceptional cases);
- Animals can go from ACHs only direct to slaughter in NI;
- Strict biosecurity measures must be in place at all times;
- The ACH must be approved annually and will be regularly audited;
- Failure to meet minimum standards will result in withdrawal of ACH status and the herd will be managed as a TB confirmed breakdown herd.

1. The ACH premises

- The ACH premises must be isolated from other TB susceptible livestock by design or location;
- The perimeter will be mapped and agreed at the initial approval visit;
- Cattle accommodation and concentrate feed stores must be constructed, maintained and operated to continuously exclude badgers and deer. Examples of how this could be achieved are listed at Annex A;
- The ACH premises can contain only ACH cattle;
- Adequate facilities and approved disinfectant must be available to effectively cleanse and disinfect vehicles, and equipment / machinery each time they leave the ACH premises;
- Testing facilities appropriate for the maximum number of animals to be kept must be available within the badger/deer proof area of the ACH premises;
- There must be facilities within the badger/deer proof area to store slurry, manure and used bedding sufficient for the maximum number of animals to be kept and the necessary duration of storage;
- There must be sufficient additional space to keep animals within the badger/deer proof area of the ACH premises to allow the safe mixing of slurry and annual cleansing and disinfection of the cattle accommodation;
- The ACH premises must have accommodation suitable for the approved maximum number and type of animals to be kept in the ACH at any time;
- There must be facilities to rear any calves born in the ACH for their lifetime. Movement to another herd will not be permitted; and
- Signage and other methods must be used to prevent visitors having unrestricted access to the ACH premises.

2. Vehicles / equipment

- All vehicles must be cleansed and disinfected before leaving the premises. Exceptions are vehicles loaded with cattle going directly to an abattoir (vehicles must be C&D'd before leaving the abattoir – see point 5) and machinery doing repetitive work from the ACH premises eg slurry spreading or silage harvesting (machinery must be C&D'd at the end of the day).
- Any shared machinery, e.g. slurry equipment, must be C&D'd before leaving the premises.

- Records of all cleansing and disinfection must be kept and made available for audit.

3. Disposal of manure / slurry / used bedding

- Records of estimated quantities disposed and the methods and locations of disposal must be kept and made available for audit;
- Manure and used bedding must be stacked as a batch for 2 months within a badger and deer proof area of the ACH before spreading onto land which is not grazed for the following 12 weeks;
- Slurry disposal is limited to the following methods: Either
 - Decontamination with Thick Lime Milk before it leaves the ACH premises; or
 - Batch storage for 6 months within the ACH premises; or
 - Direct injection into land which is not grazed for the following 12 weeks; or
 - Spread onto land using the “trailing shoe” method then ploughed in the same day.

4. People

Bovine TB is a zoonotic disease. As the ACH may contain TB infected animals operators must ensure the risk of spread to people is reduced. The minimum required is:

- Staff must wear protective clothing and footwear dedicated for use only on the ACH premises;
- Visitors must be kept to a minimum and effort made to restrict access. Clothing solely for use on the ACH premises must be worn, with the exception of authorised visitors who may wear their own waterproofs and rubber boots provided these are fully cleansed and disinfected before leaving the ACH premises;
- Clothing for use only on the ACH premises must be clearly marked as for this purpose;
- Children should not be permitted access to the ACH animals;
- Any illness or sickness in people who have had contact with the ACH animals should be reported to a family doctor immediately. They should be made aware of the potential contact with TB infected animals.

5. Movements

Cattle can be sourced from:

- Other NI herds, either directly, or via a market;
- Direct imports for Breeding and Production from the south, Britain or other EU Member States;
- TB breakdown herds where the movement will alleviate animal welfare concerns or herd keeper hardship as approved by DARD;
- Animals under individual movement restriction are not permitted to move to an ACH.

Moving cattle to the ACH:

- Animals can be moved using standard MC2 movement documents;
- Multiple pick-ups are allowed;

- The vehicle must be cleansed and disinfected after unloading at the ACH and must leave empty, except if proceeding directly to an abattoir solely with animals intended for delivery there.
- (Movements from a TB breakdown herd require an MC2L specific licence. Multiple pick-ups are not allowed).

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Moving cattle from the ACH

- Only direct movements to slaughter in NI are permitted from ACHs, using standard MC2 movement documents.
- Vehicles must transport animals directly from the ACH to the abattoir. No further pick-ups are allowed after leaving the ACH premises.
- Vehicles used to transport animals must be cleansed and disinfected before leaving the abattoir.

6. Testing and compensation

- The ACH will not normally be required to present animals for TB testing (annual herd tests, lateral check tests and breakdown tests) provided it is being operated in compliance with the conditions for approval;
- Forward traced animals (CTTs) will not be tested;
- Private TB testing is not permitted in an ACH;
- No animals will therefore require compulsory slaughter;
- Disclosure of lesions at routine slaughter will not trigger breakdown herd testing at the ACH;
- Loss of carcase value is solely at the herd keeper's own risk;
- DARD may require animals to be presented for TB testing at its discretion, for example, if high levels of TB lesions are found at slaughter from the ACH. In this case usual compensation will be paid by DARD for animals requiring compulsory slaughter; and
- Reversion of an ACH herd to Officially TB Free status will require an immediate test and two further clear herds tests after 60 and 120 days.

7. Approval and audit

ACH approval process

- Operation of an ACH is entirely voluntary and requires the herd keeper to agree with the specific controls required to contain disease on the ACH premises;
- The ACH will be re-approved annually;
- Herd keepers with a history of poor compliance with animal identification, registration and movement controls, any disease control measures or failures of other statutory management requirements may not be considered suitable to operate an ACH;
- The approval will be made by the local Divisional Veterinary Officer.

ACH audit

- The ACH premises will be regularly audited;
- Audit visits may be unannounced and will be made at least four times per year to check compliance with the agreed "ACH Protocol" and this "ACH - Conditions of Operation" document;

- Evidence of possible contact between ACH animals and other TB susceptible livestock will be considered a major breach and will result in the immediate withdrawal of ACH status. The herd will be managed as a TB breakdown herd;
- Evidence of a minor breach will result in a warning letter and more frequent audit visits;
- Evidence of repeated or several minor breaches may result in immediate withdrawal of ACH status and the herd will be managed as a TB breakdown herd;
- Examples of minor and major breaches are listed at Annex B.

8. Exit from ACH requirements

- When a herd keeper wishes to stop operating as an ACH the intention to seek Officially TB Free (OTF) status must be made in advance in writing to the local Divisional Veterinary Officer;
- The herd will be initially given a status of “OTW – Former ACH”;
- The herd can become OTF by either slaughtering all the animals and completing a satisfactory cleansing and disinfection of the premises, or by completing an immediate test and two further clear tests (minimum 60 and 120 days later) and a satisfactory cleansing and disinfection of the premises.

9. Health and Safety

- Operating an ACH is a voluntary decision by a herd keeper to keep cattle under conditions which may be different to the normal farming practices on that premises. It is the ACH operator’s responsibility to carry out the appropriate risk assessments and to develop safe systems of working.
- For further information refer to:
 - Working Safely with Slurry – HSE advice leaflet at http://www.hseni.gov.uk/hseni_leaflet_farm_slurry.pdf
 - Use of Thick Lime Milk – seek advice from your supplier.

10. Other

- Dairy herds will not be eligible to apply for ACH status as they may contain TB infected animals and no testing is being carried out to identify which animals present a potential zoonotic risk via the consumption of milk. Milk from ACH animals must not be used for human consumption;
- Cattle Identification, Cross Compliance and other disease control (e.g. Brucellosis) requirements will remain unchanged within an ACH;
- Usual identification requirements for cattle moving from the ACH to slaughter will apply;
- Any animals showing evidence of illness, particularly illness of a respiratory nature (coughing etc.) should be immediately isolated within the ACH and the Divisional Veterinary Officer informed.

Annex A

Examples of measures to make the cattle accommodation and concentrate feed stores badger and deer proof:

- Sides of the building should not be open, but of a smooth and solid construction (i.e. not to allow wildlife to get a purchase) and be greater than 1.5m high;
- Doors should be of smooth and solid construction (i.e. not to allow wildlife to get a purchase) and a minimum of 1.5m high (solid sheets of metal can be added to a five bar gate) and should be closed when not in use;
- Gaps at the sides and under doors and walls should be no greater than 10cm and must not be able to be enlarged by digging or chewing;
- Where effluent or waste water drains into a soak away ditch, wildlife must not have access and wire or electrified pig netting at mains voltage could be used to prevent such access and to prevent the contamination of the environment and wildlife
- An alternative to adapting individual buildings and securing feed and by-product storage areas, etc is to ensure a wildlife resistant boundary to the whole ACH premises. Any boundary fencing intended as the wildlife control point must eliminate the possibility of access to the premises by badgers and deer.

Videos showing practical ways to make farm buildings badger and deer proof can be found on the DEFRA website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animal-diseases/a-z/bovine-tb/animal-keepers/biosecurity/>

The relevant videos are:

Video 4 – Biosecurity in farm buildings – Part 1

Video 5 – Biosecurity in farm buildings – Part 2

Annex B

Operation of the ACH will be audited against the ACH Protocol and the Alternative Control Herds - Conditions of Operation. Breaches found at audit will be classed as either “minor” or “major”.

Examples (this list is not exhaustive) -

Minor breach

- C&D of vehicles not completed as agreed in the ACH Protocol;
- Incomplete recording of the C&D of vehicles or the ACH premises;
- Cattle accommodation, cattle handling/testing areas, concentrate feed storage or slurry/manure/used bedding storage areas not maintained and/or operated to continuously exclude badgers and deer;
- Inadequate facilities for the C&D of vehicles;
- Insufficient approved disinfectant;
- Number of animals in the ACH greater than the agreed maximum;
- Disposal of manure/slurry by methods other than as recorded in the ACH Protocol;
- Staff not wearing dedicated clothing which is marked as solely for use in the ACH;
- Visitors not wearing either dedicated clothing or clean waterproofs and rubber boots which are fully cleansed and disinfected before leaving the ACH premises;
- Any amendment to the ACH Protocol which has not been agreed by the local D/SVO.

Major breach

- ACH cattle outside the agreed badger/deer proof perimeter;
- Non ACH cattle or other TB susceptible species within the agreed ACH premises perimeter;
- Possibility of direct contact between ACH cattle and other non ACH cattle or other TB susceptible species;
- Refusal to complete a herd test of ACH cattle if required by DARD in exceptional cases.