

WHAT IS BOVINE TB?

The focus of New Zealand's TBfree programme is the infectious disease bovine tuberculosis (TB). The disease is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*, a serious animal health problem and a threat to New Zealand's reputation in the global market for agricultural products on which the country's export-led economy relies.

The disease can affect practically all mammals, from farmed cattle and deer to wildlife such as pigs, and deer, and the possums which transmit disease between wildlife and livestock. Bovine TB is a fatal disease for possums. It is unlikely to kill cattle or deer, but will compromise their immune systems and cause clinical disease.

TB is a chronic disease which, if left unchecked, can cause generalised infection and may result in spread throughout the herd. The testing programme is designed to identify affected animals and remove them before infection becomes advanced.

In New Zealand, cattle and deer are the species most at risk of contracting bovine TB. The TBfree programme is designed to eradicate the disease by using a combination of disease surveillance (TB testing and inspection at slaughter premises), controlling stock movement, and



Naturally curious cows have been recorded sniffing and nudging possums in their paddocks – creating the opportunity for aerosol transmission of disease.

controlling possums that are the maintenance host of TB.

HOW IS BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS SPREAD?

Disease can spread within a herd, or to other herds through stock movements between farms. The testing programme and movement control regulations are implemented to minimise this risk.

In New Zealand, possums are proven to transmit TB to livestock. The disease is spread through aerosol transmission – coughing

and sneezing in the vicinity of other animals – or through contact with infected possums.

Because possums are the main transmitter of disease, reducing possum numbers helps curb the spread. Maintaining low possum numbers – below two possums per 10 hectares for a number of years – causes the disease to die out.

This is the driver behind the TBfree programme's possum control activity.

DOES BOVINE TB AFFECT HUMANS?

The risk of bovine TB being transmitted to humans through food consumption is minimal because almost all milk for human consumption is pasteurised, a process which kills harmful bacteria, and meat is inspected at slaughter plants.

Cases of humans contracting bovine TB New Zealand are rare. Hunters are at highest risk. Handling an infected animal carcass carries a small infection risk, though standard safety procedures for working with animals minimise the possibility of exposure.



WHAT DOES TB LOOK LIKE?

Bovine TB presents as abscesses in lymph nodes – a golden yellow gritty substance, and is normally associated with the neck, lungs and other parts of an infected animal.

WHY IS ERADICATING THE DISEASE IMPORTANT?

Bovine TB is an unwanted disease in New Zealand because the country's economy is dependent on top-quality disease-free agricultural exports.

International markets increasingly demand traceability in primary produce - from paddock to plate - requiring full transparency of farming practices, processing, animal health and welfare. The effect of any actual or perceived compromise on animal health from a disease such as bovine TB includes an adverse market reaction and production losses for New Zealand farmers and exporters, and direct economic costs for the farm and farmers concerned.

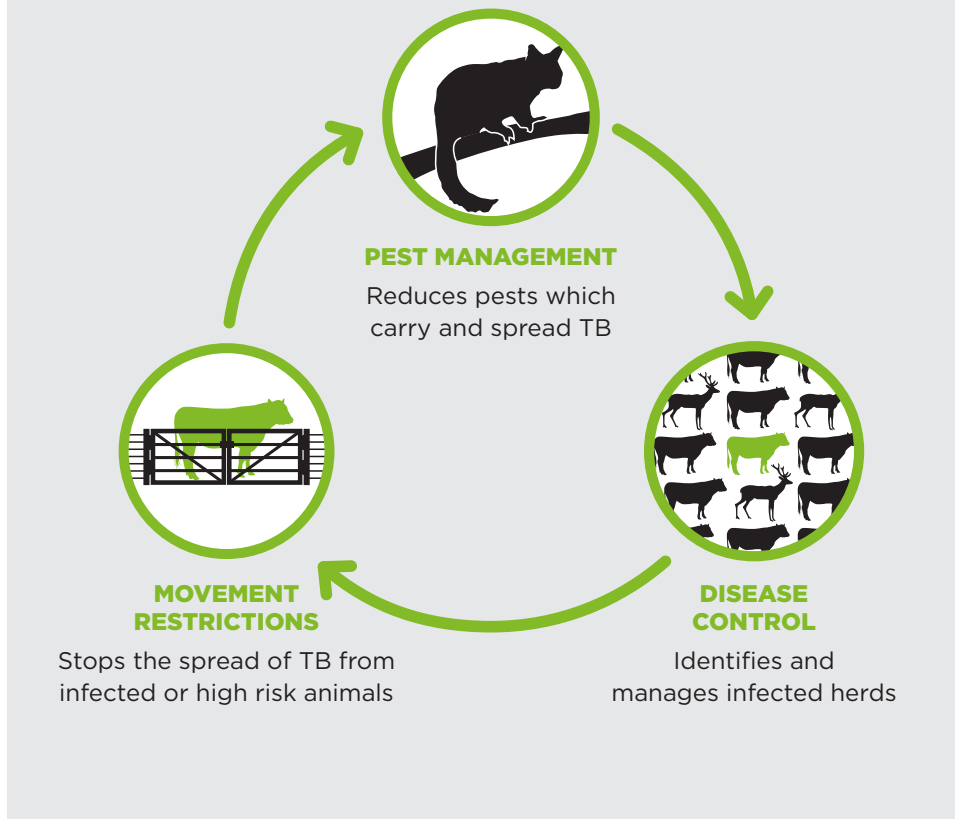
Controlling TB is therefore vital to maintaining the reputation of the country's valuable dairy, beef and deer exports, and the fundamental driver of New Zealand's TBfree programme.

An independent review of the TB programme has shown TB eradication is feasible and the most cost effective path over the long term.

HOW WILL TBFREE ERADICATE DISEASE FROM NZ?

The TBfree programme uses livestock testing and pest control to manage and eradicate disease. Controlling TB requires three key activities:

HOW WE CONTROL TB



- **Disease control** - regular TB testing and slaughter house surveillance to identify and manage infected herds
- **Movement restrictions** - to contain the risk of spreading disease between animals and herds
- **Pest management** - to reduce and control populations of possums which carry and spread TB to farmed animals.

The programme aims to achieve freedom from disease in livestock by 2026, in possums by 2040 and biological eradication from New Zealand by 2055.



FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions or need a hand call OSPRI on

0800 482 463

OSPRI, the primary sector services agency which manages the TBfree programme, publishes a host of information, research and downloadable educational material at ospri.co.nz.

OUR GOALS



2026



2040



2055