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**Submission from the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association to the  
Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eradication of Bovine TB.**

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The Square, Tubbercurry, Co Sligo.  
[www.inhfa.ie](http://www.inhfa.ie)  
email:[info@inhfa.ie](mailto:info@inhfa.ie)  
Tel: 0719302715 / 0879330793



## **Submission from the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eradication of Bovine TB**

The programme for the eradication of Bovine TB which has been in place in Ireland for over 50 years has not been successful. Other Countries have put programmes in place during this time and have managed to get the disease under control, we have not.

It is a fact that the main source of the spread of infection can be attributed to wildlife. In other Countries, various species of wildlife have been identified as being the root cause of the spread of bovine TB, but in this Country, the policy seems to be to concentrate on Badgers as the source. In an article in the Irish Veterinary Journal by Simon J. Moore [1], the author advises that the present policy of vaccination of badgers alone will not result in the eradication of bovine TB by 2030 as was committed to by the Irish Government in 2019. The author highlights how multi-species were identified in other Countries e.g., Spain – Wild Boar and Deer, France – Badgers, Wild Boar and Wild Deer and in the USA white-tailed Deer in Michigan. We would also like to refer to a study funded by the DAFM and conducted on its behalf by Dr. David Kelly, Enda Mullen and Margaret Good [2]. This study highlights the link between Deer in Wicklow and the high instances of Bovine TB. Farmers in other areas such as Donegal and Kerry who have noticed an increase in the population of wild deer in their area and at the same time an increase in the outbreaks of bovine TB feel that this link has not been properly explored.

Farmers in areas with a high density of forestry and those in the area of National Parkland where there is an ever-growing population of wild deer would feel that this is a major cause of the lack of success in eradicating this disease.

No one outside farming can understand the effects of an outbreak of bovine TB on farmers and their families. The mental anguish and the stress caused when animals, many of whom have been born and raised on the farm, are taken away for slaughter is indescribable. The knock-on effects of the outbreak are many. The farmer's thoughts are consumed by what will be the outcome of the next test, they will fear that more of their stock will be lost. Compensation does help to replace animals however it does not take into account the interruption to breeding programmes many of which are designed to allow for cash flow into the business at various times of the year. It can take a number of years following the outbreak to get farm finances back in order. Again, this all adds to stress to the farmer and their family.

In Countries where there are natural predators of wildlife the strongest animals survive and this leads to a healthier population of wildlife. As there are no natural predators of Deer in this



Country the population of wild deer continues to grow. The increase in deer numbers results in the animals having to travel further to seek food. In County of Wicklow, it has been noted that deer are now moving across the border into County Kildare. Over the past number of years, the numbers of deer in Donegal have increased and farmers in Leitrim, Sligo and Galway have also reported an increase in the deer population in their areas. Similarly, farmers in Kerry have for a number of years drawn attention to their belief that there is a link between the number of deer in parts of their county and outbreaks of infection in cattle in those areas.

The practice of erecting deer proof fencing around farms in areas of high infection has proved to be successful. However, this will keep deer from entering fenced lands but will only result in the problem being moved on to other farmers. Deer will migrate to wherever they can find food. This will bring the problem to farmlands that never experienced it before and it will also result in deer ending up in towns and villages and on busy roadways thus causing more damage. We would suggest that instead of farmers fencing deer out of their lands that deer be fenced into specific areas where they can be managed. This would need the implementation of a proper deer management programme to be overseen and run by trained and experienced gamekeepers. To this end state owned lands with suitable habitats for deer could be allocated as deer sanctuaries. These areas would be managed by gamekeepers. It appears to many farmers that no state agency is willing to take responsibility for the deer population. In all properly managed deer herds necessary culling is carried out at the appropriate times of the year and we would suggest that there is no need for the product of these culls to go to waste this high protein meat could be processed and exported to Countries suffering from food poverty as part of Ireland aid to these countries.

Climate change poses many challenges for all the citizens of the Country. Our bovine herd comes under much scrutiny regarding methane emissions. In the January 2022 report by Scottish Environmental Link, it was noted in relation to deer in Scotland – “As well as damaging emerging woodland and peatland, deer produce 5,500 tonnes of methane each year this is the equivalent of 137,500 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>”. No similar study appears to have been carried out here but it can be assumed that if done so it would produce the same result.

The area around restricting herds needs to be examined. Restricting a farmer because he owns or rents land adjacent to a farmer who has had an outbreak should only happen when they both have had bovines in these adjoining plots. Testing herds that have not been in contact with other herds causes stress to both farmer and animals and can have a detrimental effect on cows that are in calf.



In conclusion, our present eradication programme costs the exchequer a lot of money each year and it is in all our interests to find the best solution to this problem. We need to look more closely at the measures taken by other countries and to adapt the policies that will work for us.

There is no point in commissioning reports on the matter if recommendations made in these are not implemented. It is time for all the parties who have input into this to work together to find a solution. Every possible source of infection needs to be treated with the same priority as the prevalence of different carriers of the infection vary from area to area.

**References:**

1. Irish Veterinary Journal 72 Article 3 (2019)
2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.632525>