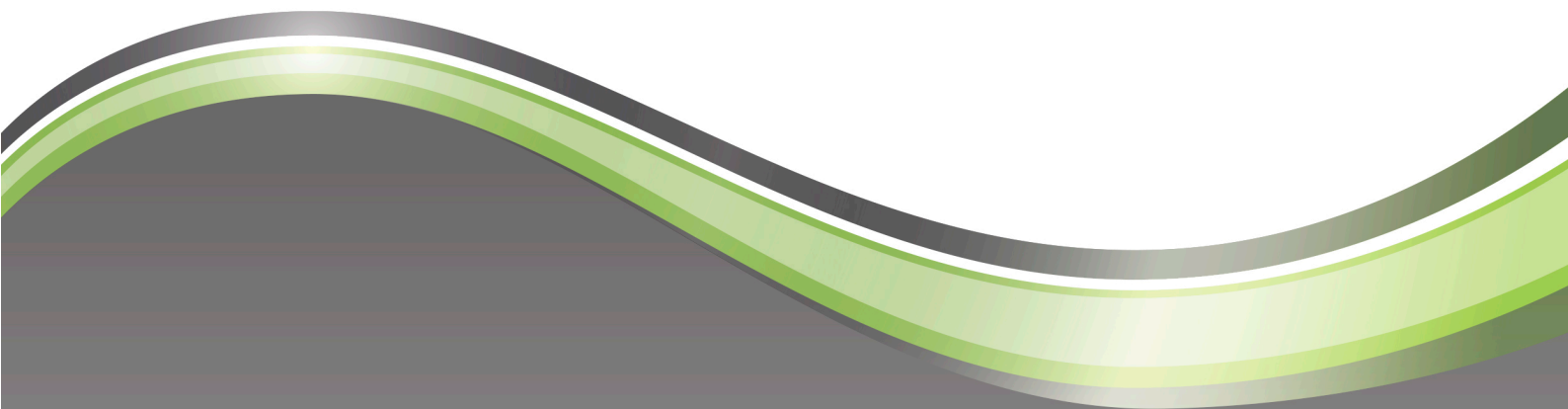




# Introductory Guide for CHECS TB Entry Level Membership

May 2021



## About CHECS TB Entry Level Membership

Introduced in 2021, CHECS TB Entry Level Membership is a baseline biosecurity standard comprising a range of easily-achievable measures recognised by the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA), Defra and the Welsh Government to reduce risk of a TB breakdown. CHECS sets the standards for TB Entry Level Membership but, as with all other disease programmes, it is administered through participating cattle health schemes and licensed and quality-controlled by CHECS.

Farmers and cattle owners who wish to become CHECS TB Entry Level Members must comply with at least one biosecurity option from each of six different biosecurity Risk Factors. A BCVA-Accredited TB Veterinary Advisor (BATVA, see more at [www.bcva.org.uk](http://www.bcva.org.uk)), is required to complete a declaration alongside the cattle owner and submit the form to their cattle health scheme before Membership can be granted (*See Appendix 1 for a specimen Membership form showing the Risk Factors, biosecurity options and declaration*).

As well as being a standalone standard, CHECS TB Entry Level Membership forms the biosecurity basis of CHECS TB Herd Accreditation, and from 1 August 2021, anyone wishing to become Herd Accredited will need to have first completed Entry Level Membership. Veterinary surgeons who currently deliver CHECS TB Herd Accreditation for their clients will need to take part in the short training course to be able to sign off on the new Entry Level Membership section, or ask a colleague who has completed the BATVA training do that part for them.

The key points behind the launch of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership are:

- TB is an infectious cattle disease like any others and so risk can be reduced using the right biosecurity measures.
- CHECS TB Entry Level Membership starts the process of regaining control by initiating biosecurity and disease pathway discussions between farmer and vet.
- CHECS TB Entry Level Membership is flexible and simple, its measures are achievable; there really are 'no regrets' to doing this.

## 1. About CHECS

CHECS (formerly known as Cattle Health Certification Standards) is the body that certifies and quality-controls CHECS licensed cattle health schemes in the UK and Ireland. This means it does not run a scheme itself, but it ensures the schemes you use operate to the same set of technical cattle health standards.

CHECS has been setting industry standards in cattle disease control since 1999, and while farmers initially joined its licensed health schemes to accredit the health status of pedigree beef animals before selling, less than a third (30%) participate for that purpose now. In fact, around 60% of new cattle health scheme members now join for management reasons, including the aim of having a healthier herd, better disease control and saving money on laboratory testing. Many more commercial dairy farmers are now realising the benefit of getting involved, with one in every three new joiners being a dairy herd.

While CHECS is better-known for its programmes covering BVD, IBR, Johne's Disease, Leptospirosis and Neospora, it added CHECS TB Herd Accreditation in 2016. See the CHECS Bovine TB Technical Document for more information.

## 2. Frequently Asked Questions

**What is behind the development of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership?** CHECS TB Entry Level Membership originated in Defra's 'Next steps for the strategy for achieving bovine tuberculosis free status for England' report, published March 2020 in response to the Godfray review. This report acknowledged both the high standard required for CHECS TB Herd Accreditation but also the low uptake. It discussed the benefits of encouraging the cattle industry to adopt a smaller set of 'no regrets' biosecurity measures. This idea developed into CHECS TB Entry Level Membership, which provides an easily-achievable first step for a farm business to take more control of TB risk by improving biosecurity. (See *Appendix 2 for more information on the background to the development of the standard*).

**Does CHECS TB Entry Level Membership carry any incentives, or does not engaging mean penalties?** No to both questions. CHECS TB Entry Level Membership is completely voluntary. In time, however, it may provide a useful indication of the level of biosecurity engagement by a farmer selling breeding livestock, milk or meat and thus attract earned recognition from customers and suppliers. It is also an integral part of CHECS TB Herd Accreditation from August 2021.

**How does CHECS TB Entry Level Membership work?** Farmers wishing to apply for Membership must comply with at least one biosecurity option from each of six different biosecurity Risk Factors. CHECS TB Entry Level Membership operates in addition to statutory requirements, and only requires the involvement of the BATVA, the farmer and the chosen health scheme.

**What are the six Risk Factors?** They are:

- Risk Factor 1: Minimise TB risk from purchased cattle
- Risk Factor 2: Minimise TB risk from contact with cattle in other herds
- Risk Factor 3: Minimise TB risk from your own animals
- Risk Factor 4: Minimise the spread of TB through muck or slurry
- Risk Factor 5: Reduce TB risk to and from badgers
- Risk Factor 6: Have a TB failure contingency plan

**What is the involvement of the veterinary surgeon?** The vet needs to sign off the farmer's commitments to improving biosecurity. To do this, they need to have undertaken the short (4-hour total) BATVA training course, which can be completed over several sessions if required. The training includes a range of modules delivering the latest information on risk factors in TB spread, epidemiology of the disease in badgers and cattle, as well as communications and engagement skills. While many vets deal with TB on a daily basis, scientific and technical understanding of the disease is developing rapidly, and vets should find the information very helpful.

**Why does the veterinary surgeon need to be specially trained?** Knowledge about bovine TB is evolving rapidly. As CHECS TB Entry Level Membership is about starting a conversation about risk pathways between veterinary surgeon and farmer, the BATVA course will equip veterinary surgeons with the latest information they need to advise their clients. Unlike other disease control programmes or CHECS TB Herd Accreditation, there is no confirmatory testing associated with Entry Level Membership, so training also helps to give the veterinary surgeon the right support about the chosen interventions.

**If CHECS TB Herd Accreditation doesn't require veterinary surgeons to have had training, why does CHECS TB Entry Level Membership?** A large part of CHECS TB Herd Accreditation is based on the statutory testing results from APHA, whereas no such secondary validation is available for Entry Level Membership. Therefore, the training ensures the veterinary surgeon is informed, supported and protected. CHECS TB Entry Level Membership becomes an integral part of CHECS TB Herd Accreditation from 1 August 2021, so this will introduce veterinary surgeon training into Herd Accreditation as well.

**How does CHECS TB Entry Level Membership fit with CHECS TB Herd Accreditation?**

Both are organised under the same six biosecurity Risk Factors. CHECS TB Entry Level Membership offers a number of options in each Risk Factor and the farmer has to commit – as a minimum – to the most appropriate one in each for their farm situation, although they are encouraged to commit to more. If the farmer decides to take the next step, CHECS TB Herd Accreditation builds on CHECS TB Entry Level Membership with further requirements under the same six categories and, in some cases, asking for multiple criteria to be met in each. If you apply for CHECS TB Herd Accreditation you must, from August 2021, complete CHECS TB Entry Level Membership as part of your Accreditation.

**What are the benefits of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership?** The main benefit for farmers is reduced risk of a TB breakdown through adoption of a range of easily-achievable 'no regrets' biosecurity measures. It also means they can prove to customers or purchasers that they achieve a good standard of biosecurity.

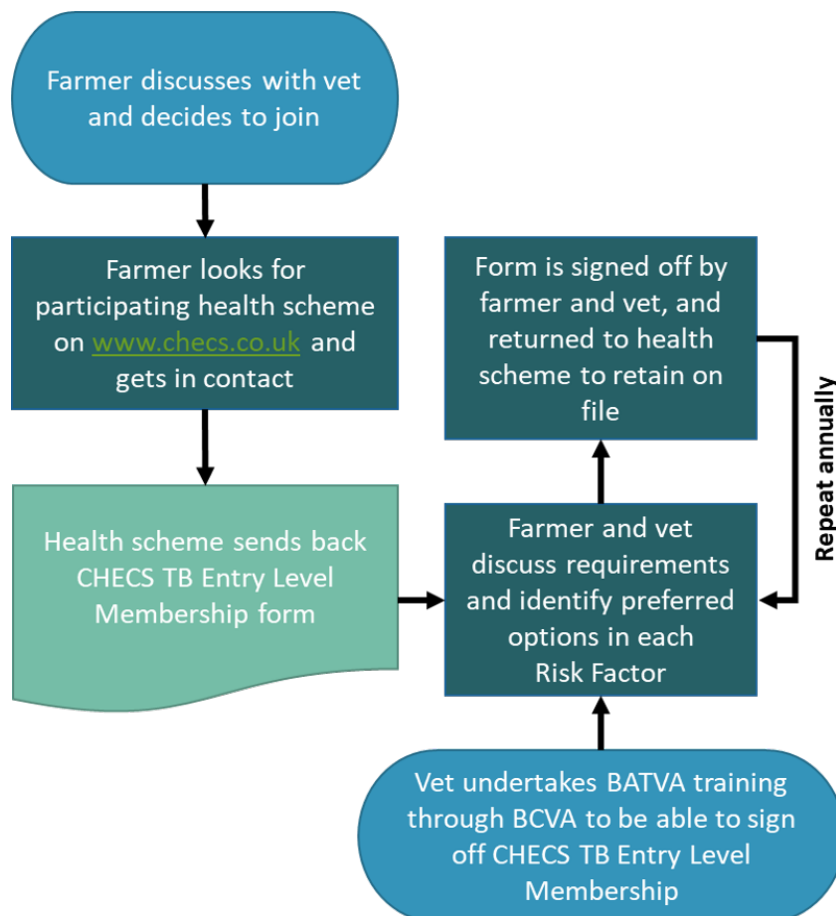
**Who will supply the Membership forms?** The cattle health scheme providers will use a standard Membership form (*see Appendix 1 for specimen*), branded with their logo. The form will double as checklist and proof that the standard has been reached, hence it needs to be a standard format.

**How will the veterinary surgeon training work?** The training is broken down into modules for the six biosecurity Risk Factor sections but there will also be tuition on background knowledge and communications skills. The course will be online and available to complete over a number of sessions, if required. The training fee for BCVA members will be £10, and £55 for veterinary surgeons who are not BCVA members. Only qualified veterinary surgeons can complete the course. Upon completion, each vet will be awarded a registration number which they use when completing the CHECS TB Entry Level Membership assessment. BCVA will retain a register of trained vets in case of the need to cross-check.

**How much will CHECS TB Entry Level Membership cost?** The main cost will be the time of the veterinary surgeon, but this can be minimised by combining this process with routine veterinary visits. Each health scheme provider may charge slightly differently, but as the information is being handled on a herd rather than individual animal basis and there is no testing involved, the annual charge is likely to range from £10 to £40 all depending on whether farmers are participating in other CHECS disease programmes; always check with the provider.

**Who funded the development of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership?** CHECS is owned by the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA), the National Beef Association (NBA) and Holstein UK. Cattle health schemes licensed by CHECS pay annual fees which help fund CHECS operations. Defra has also contributed towards development of the CHECS TB Entry Level Membership, recognising that it delivers a key recommendation in its strategy for achieving officially TB free status for England (*See Appendix 2*).

**How do farmers sign up for CHECS TB Entry Level Membership?** Farmers can approach a participating CHECS-licensed health scheme provider directly (go to [www.cheecs.co.uk](http://www.cheecs.co.uk) to find participating schemes) or join with the help of their BATVA. The health scheme will send through a form which needs to be completed by the farmer and the BATVA, who agree to implementing a selection of biosecurity interventions that will reduce the chance or length of a TB breakdown and build resilience into a farm's business. The farmer and BATVA both need to sign the declaration and return the form to the health scheme provider, which checks against a register kept by BCVA that the veterinary signatory has undergone the required training. The health scheme provider then sends final copies to both vet and farmer as well as keeping a copy on file. This process is renewed annually. See the summary flow chart below.





Health  
Scheme  
logo here

## Appendix 1: Sample Application for CHECS TB Entry Level Membership

Bovine TB breakdowns can be devastating – but often seem an inevitable fact of life. Government oversight of TB testing sometimes adds to feelings of powerlessness. However, there are things you can do to manage the ‘uncontrollable’.

CHECS TB Entry Level Membership aims to get farmer and veterinary surgeon discussing TB risk factors on-farm, and agreeing the most achievable ‘no regrets’ biosecurity measures to reduce risk of future breakdowns.

In this form, a number of options are listed under each of six Risk Factors. Only one under each needs to be selected for implementation to achieve Membership – although the more that can be committed to, the greater the opportunity to minimise the risk of a breakdown.

*Please discuss, agree the actions, sign the declarations then return the complete form to:*

Health scheme email address .....

Health scheme fax number .....

**REMEMBER, THE DECLARING VETERINARY SURGEON MUST BE A BCVA-ACCREDITED TB VETERINARY ADVISOR (BATVA) – see [www.bcva.org.uk/cpd](http://www.bcva.org.uk/cpd)**

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*For office use only*

CHECS Membership number (if appropriate) .....

Barcode label

Farm Address (inc postcode) .....

.....

.....

## **Risk Factors**

Farmers and cattle keepers are asked to discuss the six risk factors below with their British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) TB-Accredited Veterinary Advisor (BATVA – see [www.bcva.org.uk](http://www.bcva.org.uk)) and choose the most appropriate option/s in each category for their farm. **Please indicate your choice with at least one tick for each Risk Factor.** Free text boxes are supplied for additional information only.

<b>Risk Factor 1: Minimise TB risk from purchased cattle</b>	<b>Tick</b>
Purchased animals constitute a risk of introducing TB infection into the herd. The tuberculin skin test has a moderate sensitivity with approximately one in five infected animals missed at standard interpretation. However, the longer a herd has been free of TB, the more you can trust its most recent test is truly clear. By understanding the TB risk from purchased stock, more informed purchasing and management decisions can be made. Options to meet this requirement are one of the following:	
A. <i>I never buy cattle in</i>	
B. <i>If purchasing cattle, I only buy from herds less risky than my own (herds which have been TB-free for as many years as mine, or more)</i>	
C. <i>Before I purchase cattle, I look up the seller's herd's TB history on ibTB (<a href="http://www.ibTB.co.uk">www.ibTB.co.uk</a>) to inform my purchasing decisions</i>	
D. <i>After purchase I look up the seller's herd's TB history on ibTB and alter my management of the purchased cattle depending on the TB risk</i>	
E. <i>I operate an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) or Licensed Finishing Unit (LFU)</i>	
Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.	

<b>Risk Factor 2: Minimise TB risk from contact with cattle in other herds</b>	<b>Tick</b>
TB can be spread between cattle in close contact directly and via aerosols. Ensuring cattle have no nose-to-nose contact over gates, fences or hedges will reduce, if not eliminate, the risk of TB spread from neighbouring cattle. Options to meet this requirement are one of the following:	
A. <i>I have no contiguous grazing with other cattle holdings</i>	
B. <i>I never graze cattle on contiguous grazing at the same time as my neighbour's cattle</i>	
C. <i>There is a three-metre, double-fenced gap between my cattle and my neighbour's cattle</i>	
D. <i>There is no opportunity for nose-to-nose contact between my cattle and my neighbours' cattle due to a large hedge or wall</i>	
E. <i>Temporary use of electric fencing alongside my boundary prevents nose-to-nose contact between my cattle and my neighbour's cattle</i>	
F. <i>If I use common grazing, I comply with an APHA-approved TB control plan for the common</i>	
G. <i>I operate an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) or Licenced Finishing Unit (LFU)</i>	
Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.	

<b>Risk Factor 3: Minimise TB risk from your own animals</b>	<b>Tick</b>
<p>An animal that gives a negative skin test result when re-tested following an inconclusive result is known as a resolved inconclusive reactor (IR). Resolved IRs are at increased risk of having undisclosed <i>M. bovis</i> infection and in England must be restricted to the holding for life. Resolved IRs should be removed from the herd to slaughter as soon as possible and practical (the test that leads to restoration of the herd's officially TB free status). Options to meet this requirement are one of the following:</p>	
A. <i>I cull them as soon as possible after the clearing test (within the next month)</i>	
B. <i>I do not put them back in calf and cull them at the end of their lactation</i>	
C. <i>I do not put them back in calf and cull them when their current calf is weaned</i>	
D. <i>I finish them inside on farm for slaughter</i>	
E. <i>I sell them to an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU)</i>	
<p>Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.</p>	

<b>Risk Factor 4: Minimise the spread of TB through muck or slurry</b>	<b>Tick</b>
<p><i>M. bovis</i> can live for up to three weeks in well-composted farmyard manure (muck) and around six months in slurry. Ad hoc sharing of equipment, perhaps due to machinery breakdowns, can save time and money in the short term but could be a risk for introducing TB on to your farm. Contractors can also be a risk due to the difficulty of adequately cleaning and disinfecting their machinery. Options to meet this requirement are one of the following:</p>	
A. <i>I do not share my equipment or I have my own muck or slurry spreading equipment</i>	
B. <i>When using hired equipment or contractors, I ensure equipment is always visibly clean on arrival</i>	
C. <i>I ensure muck and slurry are spread onto arable land or mowing grass, or, if they are spread onto grazing grass, that grass will not be grazed by cattle for at least 60 days</i>	
D. <i>If importing cattle muck or slurry from other cattle holdings, I ensure it is not spread on to cattle grazing land</i>	
<p>Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.</p>	



Risk Factor 5: Reduce TB risk to and from badgers	Tick
<p>Badgers are known to be an important vector in TB transmission between cattle holdings. TB-infected badgers can excrete <i>M. bovis</i> in saliva, urine, faeces and pus from wounds. The most common way for infected badgers to transmit TB to cattle is via contaminated feed and water and this can be a relatively easy risk pathway to address. Biosecurity measures that reduce direct and indirect contact between cattle and badgers also protect the badger population from TB. Keeping badger populations TB-free where they are not endemically infected is vital. With assistance from your BATVA, you should be able to recognise active and inactive badger setts, latrines and runs. Being aware of the badger activity on your farm can help prioritise areas to protect. Options to meet this requirement are detailed below. You must first choose A, B or C. If you select A or B, you must then select <b><u>at least one</u></b> option from i), ii), iii) or iv):</p>	
<p>A. I have produced a simple map of badger activity on my farm for use throughout the year, to record seasonal sett use, runs and latrines. Where badger activity is identified I am reducing risk from contamination of water troughs and feed by (you must select at least one):</p>	
<p>i) Badger proofing vulnerable water troughs</p>	
<p>ii) Feeding from badger-proof troughs</p>	
<p>iii) Badger-proofing licks</p>	
<p>iv) Protecting stored feeds from badgers</p>	
<p>B. I am using wildlife cameras in yards to identify areas of badger activity. Where badger activity is identified I am reducing risk from contamination of water troughs and feed by (you must select at least one):</p>	
<p>i) Badger-proofing vulnerable water troughs</p>	
<p>ii) Feeding from badger-proof troughs</p>	
<p>iii) Badger-proofing licks</p>	
<p>iv) Protecting stored feeds from badgers</p>	
<p>C. I operate an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) or Licensed Finishing Unit (LFU)</p>	
<p>Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.</p>	

Risk Factor 6: Have a TB test failure contingency plan	Tick
<p>A TB breakdown can have unforeseen consequences for animal health and welfare, farmer mental health and farm finances. Identifying which areas of the business would be affected by a breakdown and discussing options available to you with your BATVA can reduce the disruption a breakdown can cause. Options to meet this requirement are one of the following:</p>	
<p>A. I finish all stock on farm or I can finish all stock on farm</p>	
<p>B. I have a plan for youngstock leaving the farm</p>	
<p>C. I have a plan to be able to replace stock</p>	
<p>D. I operate an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) or Licensed Finishing Unit (LFU)</p>	
<p>Please use this box if you wish to note any <u>additional</u> information relating to your chosen option.</p>	

**Farm Details – please complete in block capitals**

Farm Contact (name) .....

Business Name .....

CPH Number ..... / ..... / ..... Herd number .....

Farm Address (inc postcode) .....

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.....

Farm Telephone Number .....

Farm Email Address .....

**Declarations – please complete in block capitals**

**Owner/Manager:** By signing below, I (herd owner/manager) confirm my adherence to the indicated measures during the next 12 months. I also confirm that I understand failure to meet the requirements of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership within one month of the renewal being due after 12 months (as notified by my health scheme) will mean the suspension of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership until the requirements are met. I also understand that if the herd is CHECS TB Herd Accredited, losing CHECS TB Entry Level Membership will, from August 2021, mean the suspension of CHECS TB Herd Accreditation as well.

Owner/Manager (name) .....

Date ..... Signed .....

**Veterinary Surgeon:** By signing below, I confirm that the CHECS TB Entry Level Risk Factors indicated on this form have been addressed for this herd.

Veterinary Surgeon .....

Veterinary Practice .....

Contact Email Address .....

Contact Telephone Number .....

Date ..... Signed .....

BATVA Training Number .....

## Appendix 2: Background information on the development of CHECS TB Entry Level Membership

The '[Bovine TB Strategy Review](#)' (also termed the 'Godfray review'), was published in November 2018

Key excerpts are:

5.22. The Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHECS) organisation launched a bovine TB herd accreditation scheme in 2016. Participating farms obtain enhanced biosecurity advice and perform additional post-movement tests beyond regulatory requirements. They receive a score reflecting the amount of time since their last herd breakdown. This can be particularly valuable for herds in the HRA and EA that have never had an infection. However, take up of the scheme has been low with around 60 accredited herds [at time of publishing] in England to date (mainly high-value pedigree herds).

5.27. Existing voluntary schemes such as CHECS herd accreditation and the use of the ibTB database are poorly taken up by the industry. Though they may benefit individual farm businesses they are unlikely to be having a major effect on the incidence and spread of disease in England. Risk-based trading has not culturally been embraced by large sections of the farming community, in significant part because of lack of confidence in the value of the information available, and also because of an under-appreciation of the risks of purchasing infected cattle.

Defra's response to the report, '[Next steps for the strategy for achieving bovine tuberculosis free status for England](#)', was published in March 2020

Key excerpts are:

139. The Godfray Review noted the perceived low uptake of what it termed 'no regrets' biosecurity options. Government's starting point for 'no regrets' measures is the following subset under the Five Point Plan developed with industry partners. A further 'no regrets' measure for cattle breeders is the uptake of TB Advantage, the index of the degree of genetic resistance to bTB a particular dairy bull is likely to pass on to its offspring. TB Advantage has the potential to improve herd resilience over time. Defra is co-funding research to develop a similar index for beef cattle.

Subset of measures under the bTB biosecurity Five Point Plan:

- Restrict badger access to feed stores, troughs and mineral licks.
- Don't put feed on the ground at pasture and clean up spillages.
- Use clean, fresh water and restrict badger access to water troughs.
- Only feed waste milk to calves if it has been boiled or pasteurised.
- Put in place effective barriers between neighbouring herds.
- Avoid sharing equipment or vehicles with other farms.
- Only spread manure on arable land or pasture that is not going to be grazed by cattle for at least two months.
- Don't spread manure from other farms.