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The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
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**Open Letter**

24 February 2005

Dear Mrs Beckett

**THE CONTROL OF BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS – A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE**

We write in despair over the present disastrous bovine tuberculosis situation and the wholly inadequate approach taken by your Department in controlling the disease. There has been an 18% per annum rise in outbreaks since 1986, in which year only 88 outbreaks were recorded in the UK (DEFRA data). Following this trend, the likely outbreak total for 2004 will be around 3000. Thus DEFRA has allowed the statutory eradication of tuberculosis to go backwards alarmingly to fast approach the threshold of outbreaks during 1960 when our hard won National TB free status was achieved. If the present dire situation continues this status is likely to be lost in the near future.

You will be aware that the existence of a primary reservoir of tuberculosis in wild badgers has been known for over 30 years. MAFF took structured effective control of badgers in TB hotspot areas from 1975 until 1986. The rise in outbreaks then started when this was replaced by ineffective piecemeal control followed by no action at all outside trial areas after 1996.

You have already been advised that the Krebs trial set up in selected areas in 1998 has been hopelessly compromised and that also it is a hugely expensive exercise which is most unlikely to yield any valid results. It is thus unacceptable to continue using this trial as an excuse for inaction. The recent publication of the more extensive and thorough Four Counties trial in Ireland gives further confirmation of the results of the several trials which had already been carried out in this country prior to the Krebs report.

We fully support the field veterinarians of the State Veterinary Service, who have been prevented from taking any control measures against the primary host of bovine tuberculosis in this country and yet are still expected to control tuberculosis in cattle.

You know that tuberculous badgers suffer a prolonged and wretched death and that a quarter of over 5000 badgers tested by MAFF during 1996 to 1998 were infected (DEFRA latest figures available).

For the foregoing reasons, we the undersigned members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, therefore exhort you to ensure that DEFRA takes positive steps to properly address the control of tuberculosis in the cattle herds of this country, which of necessity, will need to involve strategic culling of infected badgers.

Yours sincerely

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