

## The amazing case for badgers

**By Christopher Broadbent**  
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The badger is a protected species. The cow is not. We eat cows. Badgers taste hideous. But because we eat cows and not badgers and because badgers are believed to transmit TB to cattle, we are embarking on a nationwide cull. Defra, as ever behind the curve, oblivious to public opinion and ignorant of science, supports the cull, and is making plans for it. Supported, unsurprisingly, by the NFU. Their President, Peter Kendall, has said '...for a badger control policy to work effectively it must be part of a range of measures to eradicate bovine TB. This includes a combination of existing cattle tests, movement restrictions, the slaughter of test positive animals, good on-farm bio-security, and, longer term, vaccination'.

This all sounds very complicated, and very expensive. We already spend £91m compensating farmers for losing infected cattle.

81% of the population oppose a badger cull. This may be why the Welsh Assembly has abandoned plans to carry it out in Wales. Good for them. But if this is the reason, it's the wrong one. It won't surprise you to learn that the answer is very simple, very cheap, involves no violence to badgers, saves cows, and would be enormously popular (especially with badgers).

Here's some history. In 1960 the UK was entirely free of bovine TB. We had a lot of badgers then too, so what were they up to?

*In 1960 the UK was entirely free of bovine TB. We had a lot of badgers then too...*



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And here's an interesting fact. There are no badgers on the Isle of Man but they have bovine TB there.

The cause is twofold, and I'm afraid it is down to farmers and their parasites, the agrochemical and feed companies. First, since the advent of industrialised farming with its accompanying rain of chemicals, our soil has become a sterile growing medium periodically injected with growth stimulants, insecticides, and herbicides. Any naturally occurring chemical soup has long since been eradicated. Second, since the 1980s, farmers have been increasingly feeding their cattle with maize (what the Americans call corn). It is important to note here that badgers love maize.

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The hero of this story, is, happily, a farmer. He is called Dick Roper and he farms in Eastington. He decided to do some digging of his own (literally) and discovered that the soil on one of his farms, which consistently showed signs of bovine TB, was deficient in selenium and Vitamin E. Both are vital to an effective immune system.

You can see where this is going. Maize, unsurprisingly, is deficient in selenium and Vitamin E. The soil is now deficient in both thanks to the haze of chemicals it has to absorb. Badgers, therefore, are suffering from lowered immune systems when they gaze naturally, and especially when they gorge on maize. Mr Roper took an unusual and imaginative step – he started feeding his badgers with mineral supplements. Lo and behold, bovine TB disappeared from his farm! Since the cows also licked his mineral cakes, they too acquired better immune systems.

What would it cost to provide farmers with mineral cakes to feed their badgers and cattle? Not £91m that's for sure. And no cost for killing badgers, controlling cattle movements, slaughtering infected cattle, and so on. Wake up Caroline Spellman, and Peter Kendall, and listen to Dick Roper. And while you're at it consider this – why do we eat cows anyway? The ratio of energy input to protein output is 54:1. (Princeton University research). That is completely unsustainable and if we carry on like this we'll be covered in nothing but selenium and Vitamin E deficient maize just to feed our beef burgers.

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