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Tuberculosis in Cattle: Training and Support for ER 76 Methodology for Epidemiological Investigations

J. J. O’Keeffe

Introduction
A revised investigation and reporting methodology for use in the investigation of herd breakdowns of tuberculosis was developed by staff at the Tuberculosis Investigation Unit (TIU) in collaboration with local veterinary staff at each of the 27 District Veterinary Offices between 1991 and 1993. The report form (ER 76) and the guidelines document was published by Griffin, O’Keeffe and Dolan (1993).

The reporting format was subjected to an extensive field trial in 335 herds in 1994, summary results of which were published by O’Keeffe (1994). The format was adopted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (DAFF) in January, 1995, for use by area Veterinary Inspectors in all epidemiological investigations undertaken from that date.

A training programme is being developed in support of this new methodology. Because the format relies on tightly defined criteria to minimise operator subjectivity, the primary objective of the training programme is to standardise the criteria to be applied. The ER 76 training programme incorporates the investigation methodology into existing DAFF structures; this is now an integral part of the task environment in relation to the management of bovine tuberculosis. The training programme aims to harness the regional veterinary management structure in standardising outputs from investigations. The ER 76 data will, therefore, be the focus for management decision-making in the future.

The regional structure, as the management unit, encourages uniformity within and between the local centres. The regular meetings of the veterinary managers provide a forum for discussing the outputs of the epidemiological investigations. The design of the ER 76 training programme takes account of the centrality of the Regional SSVI and SVI, in regard to standardising the application of the criteria applied locally, resolving individual queries and facilitating discussion of the information derived from the data.

Phase 1 May - June 1995

A training workshop was held in each of the four regions and was attended by the SVI and a VI from each local office, the Regional SSVI and HQ veterinary staff. The aim of the workshops was to advise SVI/VIs on how to run similar workshops for their own staff locally. The workshops included lectures and exercises based on case studies prepared at the TIU. The case studies and other material used were made available to those SVIs/VIs who wished to incorporate them into their workshops. The Regional SSVIs monitored the local training at DVOs.

Phase 2 February - October 1996

The current phase of training is directed toward standardising outputs within DVOs and also within regions. The SSVI/SVI role in relation to quality control is being defined. The programme in place requires each DVO area veterinary inspector to submit two or three completed reports to
the SVI for discussion. The SVI transmits these reports through the regional monthly management meetings to the TIU. At the TIU these reports (complete with computerised herd test histories for the index herd and relevant neighbouring herds) are verified and computerised. A report issues to the regional SSVI, detailing any problems encountered, or areas where definitions might need to be clarified. The SSVI’s, in consultation with SVI/VI’s in their region, then design training programmes for each site which address the needs identified locally. Staff at the TIU will liaise closely with regional SSVIs to ensure delivery of a programme that will meet these objectives. All completed ER 76 reports will be forwarded through this structure to the TIU, with feedback directed back through the structure. The overall consistency and reliability of the data should be enhanced by this formal channel.

Phase 3 1997- onwards

The purpose of all ER 76 related activity is to collect data of high quality from herds identified as affected with tuberculosis. The data, when analysed centrally and locally, will allow the test system or other elements of policy to be modified in the light of experience. Training, therefore, will be provided locally on basic computing and in the use of statistics packages, e.g. Epi-Info. Additional computer/statistical skills acquired by VI’s in each DVO will, through informal contacts and networking over time, lead to an extension of the skill base of DAFF staff. The development of a skills base in computing will enable staff to interrogate data gathered locally, and will open the data to all DAFF staff who wish to carry out further analysis on bovine tuberculosis, or other aspects of disease control in DVOs.

References