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Letter

BADGER CULLING TO END?

Progress in politics and science often happens by accident. The unforeseen impact of the foot and mouth epidemic may fall into this category. Both the Ministry of Agriculture and vets were over-stretched dealing with the crisis and so badger culling, which was to have resumed on 1 May 2001, was suspended for a year; even routine TB testing of cattle is on hold.

It seems probable that the Krebs/Bourne badger culling trial will be abandoned altogether. At least seven of the ten 'triplet' badger cull areas have been disrupted, particularly in Devon/Cornwall and Gloucestershire/Hereford. Some 600 of the 2900 badgers culled were in these two areas, perhaps 120 with TB, but only some 25 infectious. Since these were from some 400 km^2, encompassing 450 farms, it is hard to see how the culls will have made the slightest impact on cattle TB.

In fact it is already apparent that each TB badger has cost some £35000, which merely confirms the 1986 findings of the Dunnet Review that badger culls are a waste of money because they do not work. Professor McInerney, as part of the review, noted that ending badger culling was purely a political decision. If Labour had won the 1992 election, contingency plans were in place to end culls, but, sadly, by 1997 'New' Labour decided it was politically safer to go ahead with the Krebs cull. Enough data ought to be available from the trial to concoct 'scientific' reasons to grasp the nettle and take the inevitable and long overdue decision politically to end this sorry farce, once and for all.

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[See earlier reviews. *Journal of Agricultural Science*, *Cambridge* **135**, 333; **125**, 441.]

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