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Our ref RFI 2765
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Dear

Provision of requested information

Thank you for your request about the cost of cattle TB testing in England and New Zealand, which we received on 22nd June 2009. Your request has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Defra has not conducted comparative studies of TB testing costs in England and New Zealand. Although we are aware that the unit cost of TB testing in New Zealand is lower than in GB, the situation between the two countries is not directly comparable for a number of reasons:

- the single intradermal tuberculin test in the caudal fold (the primary TB screening test in NZ) is a much simpler and quicker procedure than the comparative cervical test as, among other things, it involves injection of only one tuberculin. This format of the skin test, however, is not approved for use in the EU. We have done comparative testing since 1947 to increase specificity (decrease the risk of false positives) due to cross reactions in the UK with environmental mycobacteria
- one cannot look at the costs of caudal fold tuberculin testing in isolation, as animals that react to that test in NZ must often be subjected to a serial (confirmatory) gamma-interferon blood test so as to reduce the risk of slaughtering false positives. This two-stage testing regime is not necessary in GB because the comparative skin test that we use in GB is more specific than the caudal fold test. So, although the front-line skin test in NZ may be cheaper to perform than the comparative cervical test, once you add to it the costs of the confirmatory blood test in NZ, the TB test unit cost differential is not as marked as it might appear at first sight.
- in New Zealand a large proportion of TB skin tests are carried out by approved lay testing contractors, whereas in England the vast majority of tests are performed by private or state veterinarians;

We must also take in to account other factors such as currency conversion and national cost/price indices, which are necessary to make valid comparisons in these cases.