

## TREATMENT OF CAMELIDS FOR TB

Camelid vet, Gina Bromage writes:

Our advice to anyone who suspects that an alpaca or llama has TB is **not** to treat it.

There are quite a few problems with treating camelids for TB, not the least of which is that the only reason that it's not actually illegal, as it is in cattle Tuberculosis (England) Order 2007 and in EU animal health legislation) and deer (Tuberculosis (Deer) Order 1989) is that no one in the legislative machinery at the time thought that TB in camelids would become such an issue in Great Britain.

Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government, Animal Health and the human health organizations are all very much against treatment of camelids for TB, among other reasons because this can interfere with the TB testing regime (by causing false negative reactions). Therefore, Animal Health will withdraw any cooperation in testing any infected herd which embarks upon treatment, in order to discourage it. There are moves afoot in Wales to explicitly ban the treatment of non-bovine animals for TB – see the WAG public consultation document at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/100819tbinnonbovinecons/?lang=en>

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/100819tbinnonbovinecons/?lang=cy>

That's not the end of the story, though: even if there are no legal constraints on treatment at present, in practice, it's very unlikely, perhaps even impossible, that treatment can cure advanced disease from TB, and how do we know how far advanced the disease is in a condition where the animals often show no symptoms, yet can be heavily infected with TB.

Treatment of TB in humans is very expensive and intensive, requiring daily medication for months using a combination of several different drugs that can have negative side-effects (toxicity), and we have no evidence that even this would ever genuinely cure infected animals. The fact that the drug commonly used does not even actually kill the bacterium, it only stops it growing, makes cure more unlikely. After all, the hosts show a very poor ability to kill it for themselves. It's more than likely that in trying to stave off death with treatment, we would simply be preserving an animal which can keep on infecting the rest of the herd.

Here is a quote from Ricardo de la Rua Domenech, one of the government veterinary advisors on bovine TB:

*M. bovis*, in common with other members of the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex, has a known predilection towards the development of antimicrobial resistance. Furthermore, *M. bovis* (the bovine TB bacterium) is naturally resistant to pyrazinamide, one of the four first-line drugs used to treat TB in humans. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that antibiotic-resistant strains of the bacterium are not selected in animal populations (in particular food-producing farm animals such as cattle) through the use of unproven and potentially inadequate treatment regimes, to avoid the risk of cross-over into the human population, where multiple-drug resistant (MDR) TB is already a significant problem.

