

# Honesty is the best policy

Cotswolds farmer **David Barton** talks **Emily Cole** through his appearance in the recent *Panorama* bovine TB investigation

**D**AVID BARTON'S decision to appear in the *Panorama* investigation into bovine TB was borne out of sheer frustration. Frustration that there is nothing he can do about the TB on his farm, frustration that he keeps losing stock and frustration that this year has been a disaster for his business.

"I was up for doing it, not because I want any self-publicity, but because someone needed to do it," he said, speaking from the same kitchen table as his *Panorama* interview.

The programme's investigation

*Badgers: Dodging the Bullet* featured an interview with David about the impact the disease has had on his herd. TB has claimed 44 cattle out of a herd of 156 this year alone, 34 of which were in a single test in June.

"The last test was the worst I've ever had," he said. "Some of these animals are on the farm for 12 to 15 years. You get attached to them. It's not just a commercial business."

David first heard of *Panorama*'s plans at an NFU county meeting, where he insisted that someone should be put forward so that the industry's voice could

be heard. "Time went by and I got a call from a farmer nearby who said the BBC had been in touch looking for a family farm case study, and would I would be interested?"

After consulting the NFU, David decided to go ahead with the filming. "I didn't want to go off and do it if the NFU didn't want to have anything to do with it," he added. "I didn't want to be controversial, but I felt it was necessary."

The NFU visited David on farm, advised him about things to avoid and suggested elements of the farm to point out to the *Panorama* production team. "Dealing with the media when you haven't before is quite scary, but they gave me some good briefings," David said. The NFU also advised David about security and the decision was taken not to identify the farm in any way. However, he adds that

David Barton is glad he made the decision to appear on *Panorama* and would encourage other farmers to do the same



he wasn't particularly worried about the threat of repercussions.

"If you're going to let a very small minority of people intrude in your life in that way and intimidate you then we're on the road to anarchy," he said. "What we are proposing to do is government policy – it is within the law.

"They work on the basis that the threat of doing it frightens enough people that they don't actually need to do anything," he added. And David believes that most people, regardless of whether or not they agree with the proposed cull, would have been shocked by *Panorama's* interviews with the protestor, the RSPCA chief executive and farmer Jan Rowe's revelation that someone had sent him his own funeral arrangements. "Whether you agree with culling badgers or not – that's not on."

Instead of threats, David has been inundated with praise. "I've had a lot of messages since the programme went out, saying I was courageous – but it didn't take any courage whatsoever. It just seemed the right thing to do at the time and I'm very glad I did it," he said.

He admits he hesitated when presented with a contract to sign by *Panorama*, but after showing it to the NFU, who were satisfied the document contained nothing to worry about, he proceeded.

One of David's motivations behind agreeing to the interview was to educate the public and go some way to correcting



"We live in a managed environment – all the countryside you see is managed," David said. "This idea that you shouldn't touch anything and leave everything alone – we went past that hundreds of years ago."

And the misconception that 'cows will be killed anyway' and therefore farmers don't care about their livestock, is a commonly held view that David particularly dislikes.

"As a beef farmer you have to realise that the stock you are finishing for beef will leave the farm in around two years – that's how it is. But the cattle you're breeding from and the process you go through in calving them – if anyone hasn't experienced calving a heifer down, they don't see their transformation,

David believes the decision to show cows being shot on *Panorama* was necessary and he hopes his filmed upset will have helped open peoples' eyes.

"It was very powerful," he said. "If you say to someone: 'I sent 34 cattle off to slaughter today,' it's a passing comment, that they don't necessarily take on. But when you actually see two young cows, both just first-calved cows, being shot, it's horrible and they had complaints about it.

"Most problems have a solution, but with TB there is nothing I can do about it," he said. "I could probably identify the sett that is causing the problems – it is so frustrating."

But one weapon farmers do have is their story and David believes telling it is vital.

"It is one of those things we have got to do," he said. "The more people that do it, the easier it will be, and if an individual farmer has suffered or is suffering from TB, we've almost got a duty to do it. The threat of intimidation is pretty hollow and, if you think about it, it would take a pretty mean-spirited person to intimidate a person that has just lost a lot of stock to TB. I would encourage anyone to do it. I'm quite a shy person so I understand it is not easy – but it is something we have got to do."

### Want to speak up?

- One of the best bits of PR for farmers over the cull is farmers speaking up to show the impact TB has had on their farm.
- There is plenty of help available for anyone who is considering giving an interview to the press. You can read the farming pin-up *BF&G* created about 'becoming a farming ambassador' on NFUonline, or contact your regional office, NFU HQ or group secretary.

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common misconceptions. "I don't understand why there is a general feeling among the farming community that we can't talk about a badger cull," David said. "If we are going to have one, we have to talk about it – it's as simple as that. At any opportunity I will talk to people and when I've had a discussion with them they can make their own mind up – they're entitled to their opinion but they need to be informed as to why we are doing it."

Two common misconceptions the public is guilty of believing is that the countryside shouldn't be managed and that culling cows is different to culling badgers because 'the cows will be killed anyway'.

which is just incredible.

"You've got this happy-go-lucky teenager and suddenly she's presented with a calf and in an instant she changes – it's a fantastic thing. People don't see that – but when you do and you've helped calve, you get a real attachment to these animals. There's a lot of time spent in improving your beef herd and in a swipe it is gone. I do get quite bitter about this 'you're only keeping them for two years and then they go' argument. That's why we should engage, so people understand the whole picture, and then they can make an informed choice on whether it is a good idea or not."