

# Organic food fight after brothers take opposite sides on badger cull

Jerome Starkey  
Countryside Correspondent

It has turned farmer against farmer, scientist against scientist and animal lover against animal lover. Perhaps it was inevitable that culling badgers to save cows would pit brother against brother too.

The siblings at the centre of the Riverford organic food empire, famed for supplying weekly fruit and vegetable boxes to 50,000 middle-class homes, have taken opposite views on whether badgers should be shot on their land.

Up to 33,000 are due to be killed in coming weeks under a scheme to stem the spread of tuberculosis (TB) in cattle. The government increased the number of culls from ten to 21 this year after 40,000 cows were slaughtered prematurely over the past 12 months because they tested positive for the disease. The new cull areas are in Devon, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset and Cheshire.

The youngest Riverford brother, Guy Watson, 57, who owns the vegetable box business based in Buckfastleigh, south Devon, has banned fellow farmers from shooting badgers on Wash Farm, where he grows organic vegetables.

His older brother Oliver, 58, who runs the Riverford Dairy, said that he was involved in the cull on his land near by. "I am taking part in the badger cull on the land that I farm, so too are thousands of other farmers," he said. "On balance I think this is the right thing to do."

Guy Watson said that culling may help to reduce TB but he was not sure it was necessary. "I do not feel qualified to make a judgment on whether the suffering of badgers is justified, relative to the number of cows which are saved from slaughter, or the number of farmers whose livelihoods and sanity are protected," he said.

Badgers transmit TB through bodily fluids and the government believes that culling will curb the disease but scientists are divided. The bacteria can live in the soil for a year and there is some evidence that culling encourages badgers to search out new territories, which increases infection rates. "We have taken



Guy Watson, above, has banned farmers from shooting badgers but his brother Oliver supports the cull



the decision not to implement the badger cull on land that we control ourselves as Riverford Organic Farmers but we will not be putting pressure on any of our suppliers, or other parts of my family and their businesses to participate [or not]," Guy Watson said.

The younger of the men's sisters, Rachel, 61, is the marketing manager at Riverford Organic Farmers. Their brother Ben, 60, runs a network of farm shops. The Watson siblings all grew up on Riverford farm, which gives its name to the different businesses.

It is up to owners whether culls take place on their land. Farmers who apply to Natural England for a badger control

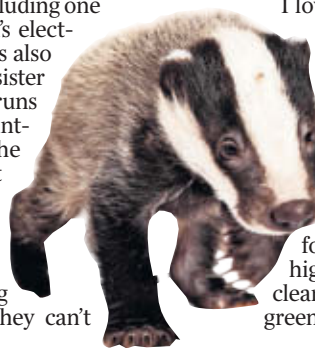
licence must get permission to access 90 per cent of the cull zone.

Guy Watson, who attracted controversy for sending political newsletters with his food boxes including one ruing David Cameron's election victory in 2015, has also clashed with his sister Louise, 63, who co-runs the dairy, over foxhunting. He said that he found it abhorrent but respected her right to do it. "In a society where people keep cats and support factory farming by eating meat, to tell people they can't

foxhunt is pretty low down the list," he said. "The fact that people enjoy it, I find personally distasteful. But hunting is a huge part of my sister's life and

I love my sister dearly. As far as possible, people should be allowed to do what they like."

Jay Tiernan, from the Stop the Cull campaign group, said that badger culling was inhumane because of "very high wounding rates". "Riverford organics' claim to have high ethical standards is clearly nothing more than a greenwash," he said.



## Willpower can last all day long (if you want it to)

Oliver Moody Science Correspondent

After ten productive hours in the office, what could be better than coming home to learn advanced Mandarin and eat carrot sticks?

Psychologists argue that we could organise our evenings with the same discipline and rigour we bring to our working days instead of slacking off with a box set and a large glass of rioja.

David Randles and his colleagues at the Toronto University have challenged the popular notion that willpower is a limited resource and dwindles over the course of the day.

Until recently, this idea had a fair amount of currency with researchers. More than 200 scientific studies have shown that sticking at a demanding activity makes it harder for people to exercise self-control afterwards.

The problem is that attempts to repeat these findings in carefully controlled conditions have largely drawn a blank. So the Canadian team set up a large experiment to determine whether there was any truth to the theory. They persuaded more than 17,000 psychology students to sign up for online learning courses and over two, four-month periods the participants each completed about 13 sessions, taking frequent tests to determine how much information they had soaked up.

The results showed that the students' accuracy rose over the first half hour of each session and then fell slightly afterwards. The researchers think this is a sign that we are prone to losing concentration after an hour or so of hard work.

Yet the time of day appeared to make little or no difference to how the students performed. Their average test score was about 85 per cent in the morning, rising by a percentage point in the middle of the day and then slipping back to its original level after 4pm. Writing in the journal *Plos One*, the researchers said that if anything, the evidence pointed to their participants taking more online classes in the afternoons and evenings.

There is an important caveat to the findings, however: the working habits and waking hours of psychology students are not necessarily representative of the wider population.



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