Normal and Dwarf Dexters

(often called, 'long legged and short legged')

As a result of a mutation hundreds of years ago in Ireland, some Dexters have a genetic fault variously referred to as Achondroplasia, Chondrodysplasia, dwarfism or short legged. The gene which causes this condition is also present in a number of other breeds of cattle.

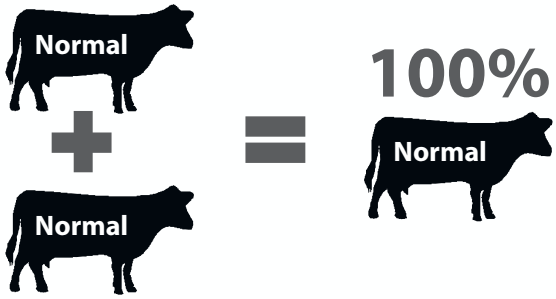
The good news

Dexters can now easily be tested to find out if they have Chondrodysplasia dwarfism. Dexter Cattle Australia sponsored a research to isolate the gene and to positively identify which animals carry it. This research has been successful and tests are now available to test for the presence of the gene in any Dexter. According to the researchers the most correct name for this genetic condition is "Chondrodysplasia".

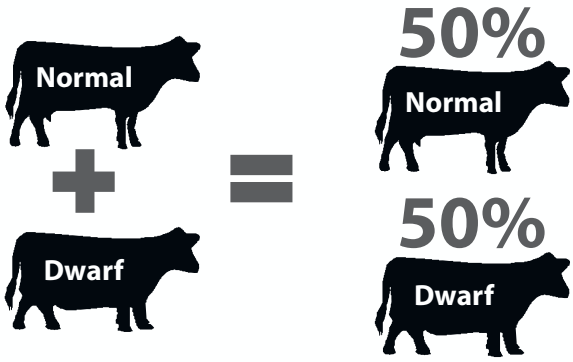
A Dexter carrying the Chondrodysplasia dwarfism gene has shorter legs and a shorter head than normal Dexters. Some of these animals suffer from misshaped legs and develop arthritic conditions at an early age. The expression, "long-legged" is used to distinguish the normal Dexter from the Dexter carrying the gene. The normal Dexter, though smaller than the larger breeds, is in the same proportions as the larger breeds, but just smaller. Because the Chondrodysplasia gene disrupts the normal bone growth, particularly in the head and legs, the dwarf Dexter is not in proportion to larger breeds.

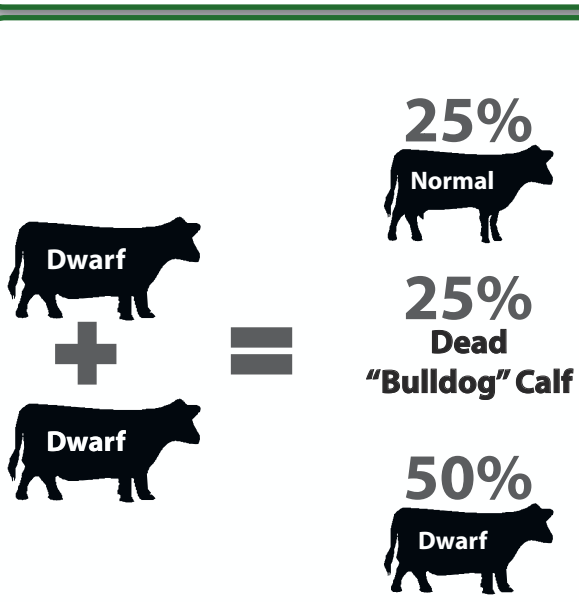
This condition in Dexters is very closely related to a condition in humans which results in dwarf people. In humans, the child of a parent with dwarfism and a normal parent has a 50% chance of being normal and a 50% chance of having dwarfism. A child of two parents with dwarfism has a 25% chance of being normal and a 50% chance of having dwarfism and a 25% chance of being a still birth. The same situation applies in Dexters. In the case of the still birth in Dexters, the calf is usually aborted in mid-late pregnancy and has no bone formation. This aborted foetus is known as the bulldog syndrome because of the similarity of the head of the aborted foetus to that of a bulldog.

Normal Dexter Mated to Normal Dexter



Dwarf Dexter Mated to Normal Dexter





A number of important facts need to be born in mind with regard to this condition when making breeding decisions.

- No normal Dexter carries the gene and cannot therefore pass the gene on to its progeny, even if there may be carriers of the gene in its ancestry. Those who choose to breed only animals free of the gene can do so by ensuring that they do not purchase or breed with dwarf Dexters. If uncertain, a DNA test can be requested.
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- Where an animal carries the gene, its calves will not be consistent in size - some will be shorter in stature (those animals which are the carriers of the gene) and some will be larger in stature (those who are not carriers of the gene).
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- For those who opt to breed with dwarf Dexters, Dexter Cattle Australia recommends that to ensure that no pregnancy results in a dead "bulldog" calf, the dwarf Dexter should always be mated with a normal Dexter.

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