Out of the Ordinary? Time to Report.

While all cattle breeds have genetic defects, most are rare and inherited in a recessive manner so that the condition is seen only if a calf inherits the gene from both parents. Two gross physical deformities with lethal consequences in Jersey cattle have been documented and declared genetic abnormalities by the American Jersey Cattle Association: Limber Legs (LL) in 1972, and Rectovaginal Constriction (RVC) in 1975.

If this is news to you, there's good reason. Both abnormalities were brought under control in the early to mid '80s through a program of reporting affected animals, expert veterinary examination and pedigree documentation, followed by Board designation and labeling of carrier animals. About all most Jersey owners know today of Limber Legs and RVC is to note the "Designated Abnormality Carriers" list when it is published in Jersey Journal, or to occasionally find a bull with (LL) or (RVC) as part of his registration name on old registration certificates or pedigrees.

Why bring this up? Because unrecognized or ignored, abnormalities that prove to be genetic in origin can wreak havoc on a and devastate the finances of its owners, as most famously happened to North American Herefords because of dwarfism.

The lesson of "The Battle of Bull Runts," is—any time, every time—an abnormal animal is born, or an abnormality develops in an animal—no matter what one suspects the cause to be—the only correct action to take is to report it to the breed association.

There are three important ingredients in controlling genetic abnormalities: reporting, labeling the carriers, and making this information available to the people making breeding decisions. Accordingly, the American Jersey Cattle Association adopted a comprehensive genetic abnormality policy in 1983. The key points are these:

- It is "the responsibility and obligation of each member of the Association and each breeder of Jersey cattle to report any known case of an abnormal Jersey animal."
- The association maintains a recording system to monitor abnormalities in Jersey cattle and, based upon expert scientific advice, has defined procedures to determine if the source of an abnormality is genetic.
- It is "unethical practice to offer for sale an animal, male or female, an embryo or semen from an animal that has been designated a carrier of an undesirable genetic factor without first informing the prospective buyer of this fact."

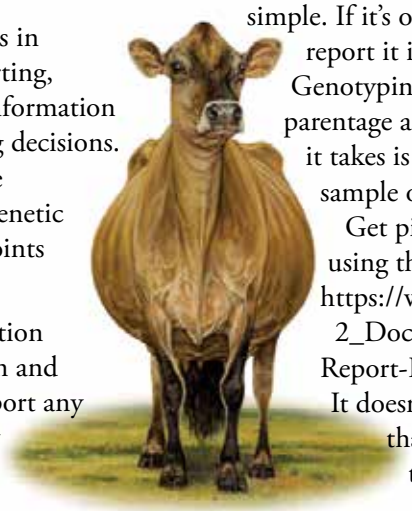
The Association's policy regarding genetic abnormalities is built upon the foundation of fact and documentation and openness. It has served this breed well before, and will do so again if it ever becomes necessary, "but only to the degree that all cooperate in the acceptance and enforcement of this policy."

Whether or not the AJCA's abnormality program is effective depends almost entirely upon how complete the reporting is. The incidence of an abnormal condition—by definition—is low. It's out of one's experience. The possibilities for an affected animal to not be found, much less reported, are endless. If one of them died as a calf, or was killed by lightning, or was sent to slaughter because she didn't settle to the pasture bull ... you see how easy it would be to miss an affected animal. Without being vigilant, and training one's employees to be equally attentive, a costly, perhaps even lethal abnormality can be perpetuated at the expense of all.

The question always arises, "What do you report?" It's simple. If it's out of the ordinary in your experience, report it immediately to the Association. Genotyping is a powerful tool that let's us confirm parentage and delve into the genome more closely. All it takes is a tissue sampling unit (TSU), a hair sample or blood sample of the affected calf.

Get pictures and document the details by using the form on the USJersey web site at https://www.usjersey.com/Portals/0/AJCA/2_Docs/Genetic-Resources/Abnormality-Report-Form.pdf. Call the office.

It doesn't matter what you see. It matters that you report it, if it doesn't look right to you or your veterinarian.



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