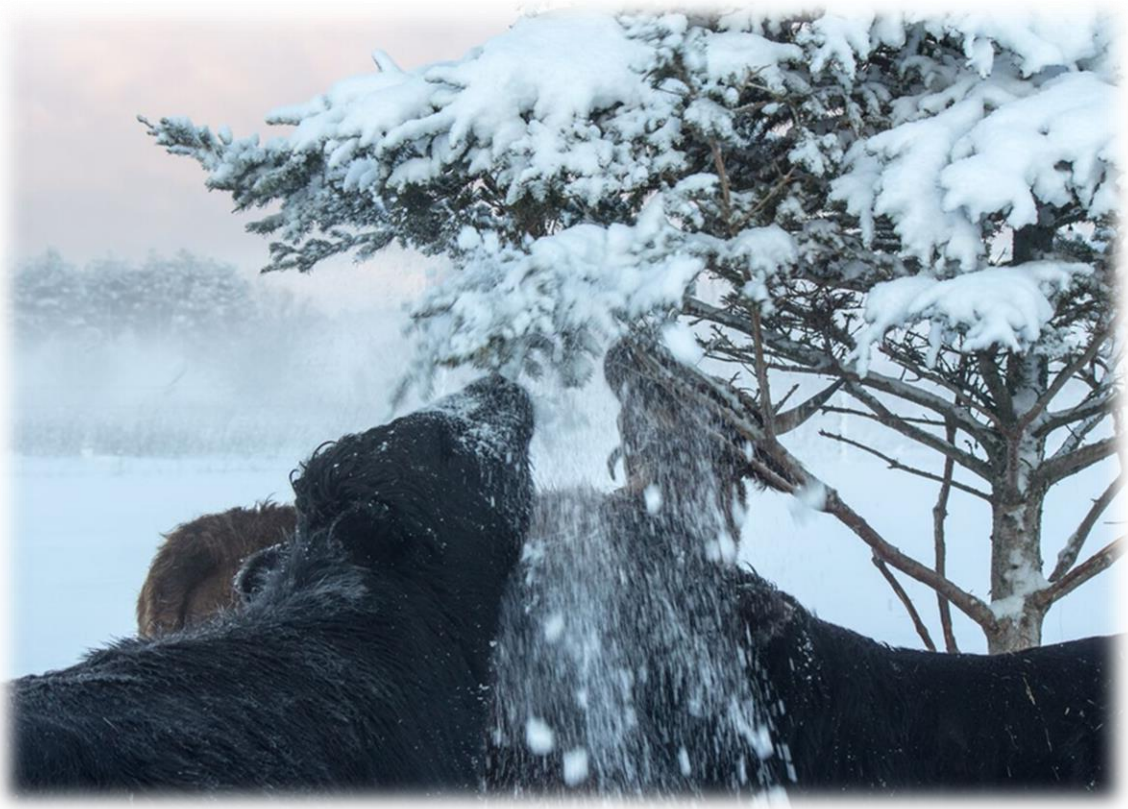
Irish Dexter Times

Legacy Dexter Cattle Breeders

Issue 5 / Winter 2018

Welcome to our New Year!



Dreaming of Spring …
as Winter marches on

LDCB

Photo: Kaldakur

The Charm of Dexter Chondrodysplasia

Cattle have existed in Ireland for a very long time. Over the years, the cattle of Ireland distinguished themselves from cattle of other lands. Many of the landholders in Ireland, were small landholders, and the lands they farmed were sometimes rugged and mountainous. Irish farmers selected the cattle that performed best for them, the smallest ones. In this manner, the size of Irish cattle decreased over the years.

In around 1830, the term Dexter cattle was first used to describe the shortest of the Irish cattle. For the most part, these short cattle were dwarfs, with a unique form of dwarfism that caused them to have short legs. All the long bones could be affected, but it was the short lower leg that was most noticeable. These cattle were the shortest of all.

Farmers continued to favor the short cattle. However, it was not understood why they sometimes had offspring that were taller and didn't have the short lower legs. They also didn't understand why they sometimes had calves that were born dead and were deformed. These calves were given the name "bulldog calves" due to the shortened nose that resembled a bulldog's face.

Brenn of Paradise

In the latter part of the 20th century it was recognized that the bulldog calves could be traced to certain bulls and breeders began culling bulls that were known to produce a bulldog calf. Selection helped create a herd or two that no longer had bulldog calves.

The cause behind the bulldog calves did not emerge until right around the turn of the 21st century. Australian researches identified a specific gene that caused it and provided a DNA test that could identify each Dexter that carried the gene. They named the gene the chondrodysplasia gene and described its effect upon the Dexter that carried it.

A calf that inherited one copy of the gene would exhibit the short-legged appearance of a carrier. An embryo that inherited two copies of the gene would either be aborted prematurely or born dead. None ever survived. There are no Dexters alive that have two copies of the gene.

It was revealed that both bulls and cows could carry the gene. Dexters that did not carry the gene were typically long legged and stood taller than those that carried the gene. Those that carry the gene exhibit the Dexter short legs. There are degrees of affectation that causes the heights and leg lengths to overlap. The very best experts were only able to pick which Dexters were chondro carriers with 85% accuracy. The DNA test for chondro is virtually perfect in its ability to show which Dexters carry the gene.

At first, the DNA test was hard to get. You applied to have the test, then waited until there were enough test requests to make up a batch. It could take months. Once people discovered that chondro was to blame for bulldog calves, some decided to eliminate chondro from their herds rather than test for it.

A bad mistake this was. Up until this point, almost all the promotional material for the Dexter breed featured the short-legged Dexter. Newcomers were shocked to discover that the little Dexters they had fallen in love with were not so little in many cases. There was more to it than the size, too. In a mixed herd of carriers and non-carriers, the chondro carriers were likely to be the submissive ones and the non-

carriers were dominant. This behavioral pattern could be observed in the offspring of a breeding pair. Dexters that were identical in other respects showed a different personality. The chondro carriers were meeker, likely to be at the bottom of the pecking order. They eagerly sought out humans for companionship. If you owned a mixed herd of carrier and non-carrier Dexters, most likely your favorite was one of the chondro carriers.

By 2010, the DNA test for chondro was readily available with short turn-around times. It was easy to foretell which of your calves carried chondro well before they became old enough to breed. It became widely known that you shouldn't breed a chondro carrier to a chondro carrier, since this is the only way you can get a bulldog calf. The incidence of bulldog calves dropped to near nothing.

Today, we have had a complete turnaround. With so many people eliminating chondro from their herds, it has now become hard to find a source to buy a chondro Dexter. The demand for chondro Dexters exceeds the supply. Breeders in the know are now searching for seed stock that carries the chondro gene.

There are three plans for eliminating bulldog calves from your herd. 1) You can eliminate all chondro carriers. 2) You can keep a chondro carrier bull and no chondro carrier cows. 3) You can keep a non-chondro bull and a mixed herd of cows.

Visitors to Paradise Farm usually go away having picked Cathy as their favorite. Her small size draws them, then her friendly manner captivates them. I explain to them that her chondro condition is mainly responsible for the things they like about her.

For years I kept a chondro carrier bull. I enjoyed his personality so much that I was willing to forego owning any chondro carrier cows. Today, I have a non-chondro bull and can keep all the chondro carrier cows I want. Luck has entered into this. Ever since I switched bulls I have only gotten one chondro carrier cow to keep here. I wish I had more

The short legged chondro Dexters have a more gentle outlook on life. They are less excitable, calmer. They tend to be low in the pecking order of the herd and are anxious to seek out human companionship. Their small size makes them less intimidating, so it is easy to be relaxed around them. If you are going to spend a lot of time around your Dexters, these are the ones to have. They make great pets.

Shortie Dexters are easier keepers. Those I've had always seemed to be rounder and more filled out, even during the harshest times of year. I've heard it said that a good shortie cow could exist on a diet of just air.

Chondro cows seem to make smaller calves than their non-chondro sisters. They are quite precocious, maturing earlier. Yet they calve easily, almost always without assistance. The smallest calf ever born here was a 20lb calf born to a chondro cow.

by Gene Bowen

This is Caethru Inion of Paradise, a 37" tall chondro cow.

Note her sleek coat and her full belly. Cathy has never had a needle pierce her skin. No antibiotics, no vaccinations. Just her natural Dexter immunity that keeps her healthy.

Winter 2017-2018!!

Fireman's Run Farm

This one is going down in our memories for sure. At least in mine. Cold, cold, cold and more cold. For us and for our Dexters.

We've seen frigid temperatures across the country coupled with snow, ice and freezing rain. Bitter fronts even moving into the southern states, bringing us those rare photos of our friends in Florida, Alabama, and Texas shoveling snow. Amazing! And the wind, that north wind… The word relentless comes to mind. We've set new all-time records in areas like Erie, PA with over 130" of snow so far this season, with more in the forecast and months left to go. Much of it, 65in plus, from one storm alone over the Christmas holiday.

Truth is our Dexters and all of us as their caretakers have been tried so far this year. But we are up to the test! Thanks to the founders for giving us such a hardy, adaptable cow. Our breed is amazing!

The Irish Dexter may be the smallest breed of cattle, but it is also one of the toughest.


Wolsey Farm


KRO Acres

Legacy Registry

The PROGENY feature is now available on the pedigree files in the World Section. Exciting news for all of us who enjoy browsing or researching early pedigrees.

Legacy Dexter Cattle Breeders

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Secretary – Karrie Winebrenner
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WORLD HISTORICAL PROJECT
LEGACY DEXTER CATTLE REGISTRY

Legacy invites Dexter owners worldwide to enter your Dexters and their photos into the Legacy Registry. A unique One-of-a-kind Dexter registry with the wonder of the past, the focus of the present, and the promise of the future.

YOU are needed to bring reality to the dream. A dream of an unprecedented historical record of the Dexter breed recorded in pedigrees to the earliest Dexters with available photographs and data in one location available to ALL for information, research, or simple pleasure. Legacy keeps the cost to place your Dexter in the registry at a minimum, so all can participate. Participate by adding your Dexters and their photos, early photos and articles of Dexters and their owners.

PLEASE PARTICIPATE!

I am a Dexter!

Legacy Jams Dunder #L00083LH-06HH is an amazing bull with the pedigree to match. Strong tri-purpose build and that all-important "Traditional Dexter" temperament that is such a hallmark of the breed.

I first met Dunder a few years back when he came here and "visited" with us and our three heifers for a while. New to the breed, I wasn't really sure what to expect. We'd had bulls here before, but that was back when we kept angus. I'd never been around a horned bull before. And what horns they were, he stepped off the trailer and was spectacular.

A true gentleman the whole time he was with us, even while dealing with a drought and far less room than he was used to; Dunder helped us build our new hay barn that summer and gave us three cute little calves the following spring. My favorite memory was that of him caring for Caitlyn our littlest heifer at the time. It was obvious that he took to her, and she to him. I believe he remembered her from their first meeting when she was a very young calf standing alongside her mother. One day little "Lynnie" as we called her just couldn't quite reach the hay in the middle of the ring. Dunder fed her first. One bite for her, and then one for himself. She waited patiently beside him, as he placed the piles of hay on the ground before her. It was amazing!

by Karrie Winebrenner

Prepare Cattle for Winter to Minimize Cold Stress

by: Heather Smith Thomas

Cattle need care during cold or wet weather to make sure they stay healthy and perform well. A well managed program to prepare cattle for winter and minimize cold stress can save money and reduce the number of sick animals.

Pregnant cows

Body condition should be assessed as a cow goes into winter; she should be fed to maintain or regain moderate to good condition -- to withstand the rigors of bad weather without loss of production. Body condition is generally rated on a score of 1 to 9 (1 denotes emaciation; 9 is obese). Most stockmen try to keep cows at score 5 to 6, for best health and fertility.

Thin cows suffer more cold stress and rob body fat stores to keep warm. Calves may be born weak, cows may not produce adequate colostrum, calf survivability is lowered, as is the cow's ability to breed back on time. To help cows maintain health and body condition, vaccinations should be kept up to date, parasite populations should be determined (and cattle dewormed and deloused if necessary) and windbreaks and bedding should be provided during the worst of winter's storms.

In most herds the cows should be sorted into groups - by body condition and/or age -- and fed accordingly (or utilizing different types of pasture). Then you can feed the thin or young ones (or have them in the best pastures) for weight gain without overfeeding the rest. Feeding the whole herd your best pastures or extra rations (the high level of nutrition needed by the young or thin ones) is costly and wasteful, so it pays to separate the cattle.

How much feed or supplement a cow needs depends on weather, body condition, available pasture or crop residue (quantity and quality), age of cows, whether they are still nursing calves, dry, or ready to calve again soon, or fall calved and need extra nutrition to milk well and breed back again.

Some herds do well in fall and winter on good native pasture (unless snow covers the feed) especially if cows are dry and not nursing calves. Some dryland bunch grasses (on good soils) will meet all the nutrient requirements of the dry cow except salt. Salt should always be provided for cattle since this is the only mineral not found in feeds and forages. Other kinds of pasture, especially "tame" or irrigated pastures or crop residues, lose some of their nutritional value if they dry up or freeze, and cows will need supplemental feed -- hay, silage, grain, or supplemental protein and a mineral mix. Cows on mature grass or crop residues may need phosphorus, a mineral that is most important to the cow in the last two months of gestation and the first three months after calving.

After calving, the cow's energy requirements increase anywhere from 17 percent to 50 percent, depending on her milk production. Inadequate feed at this time can lower weaning weights and reduce conception rates when cows start to rebreed. If cows calve during winter (January, February, early March), care must be taken to ensure adequate nutrition. How much feed a cow needs during early lactation depends on her milking ability and upon the weather -- how cold or wet it is. If the cow is shortchanged on feed during cold or wet weather and isn't able to supply her needs for lactation and body warmth, she'll lose weight and have trouble rebreeding.

Results from a three year study in South Dakota show that cows with higher body condition scores tend to return to heat earlier in the breeding season and are also more likely to settle. Thin cows (condition score 3 or less) have the poorest chance of becoming pregnant. Several other studies have shown that average body condition (score 5) at calving and at the beginning of the breeding season results in high reproductive performance. Ideal body condition can vary with cow type, season, and geographic location. As a general rule, cows in cold climates need more flesh covering to perform well than do cows in warm climates.

Kaldakur

Sort cattle by nutrient needs

Young cows need extra nutrition for growth as well as reproduction especially pregnant yearlings and two year olds that have just weaned their first calves. The two year old cow is at the most difficult age (growing, milking, putting energy into the developing fetus of her second calf, shedding the last of her baby teeth). Most stockmen give special attention to a two year old as she calves and prepares to breed back, but they don't always take into consideration that she needs pampering through the next pregnancy (especially during winter) until she is safely bred back again as a three year old. Her two year old winter is a critical time.

By contrast, mature cows, especially if they enter winter in good body condition, can get by on plainer feed, available fall pasture or crop residue (with supplements added if conditions warrant) until they get close to calving again. Old cows may need to winter separately or with the young ones, if they are thin. But mature cows in good flesh can actually lose weight during winter with no adverse affect on productivity; as long as

they have good feed and proper nutrition after calving. It's cheaper to prevent severe weight loss before calving, however, than to put it back on after calving when their needs are so much greater.

Adjust for cold weather

Closely monitor condition of cows as they go through winter. If some start to lose weight, you have time to correct this by feeding hay to supplement dwindling or snowed under pastures, or increase the hay ration if weather turns cold.

If weather is cold and windy, cows need extra feed just to keep warm. They may stand around or huddle behind windbreaks instead of grazing. Even if pasture is available, they may not graze until mid day when temperatures are warmest -- losing weight because they don't cat enough. This problem can be solved by giving some hay or supplement early in the day to get them going -- then they will start grazing.

A cow needs to eat more roughage in cold weather, to give her the calories for heat energy. If she doesn't have enough roughage, the pounds will melt off her as she robs body fat to create energy for warmth. More total pounds of roughage in her diet (extra grass hay, or even straw) can keep her warm, since the fermentation and breakdown of cellulose creates heat energy. High quality alfalfa hay supplies protein, calcium, vitamin A and other important nutrients, but not enough roughage for heat energy in cold weather. Alfalfa alone is not adequate for cattle in cold temperatures; cows will gobble it up and stand around shivering, losing weight. If a cow is cold, she should be given all the roughage she will clean up. Even for lactating cows, a mix of alfalfa and grass hay is more ideal than straight alfalfa. Cattle who have a chance to acclimate gradually to winter will develop a good hair coat, and put on body fat if feed sources are adequate. Hair and fat serve as good insulation against the cold. With a summer hair coat the typical beef cow may chill when temperatures drop below the mid 50s, whereas with a heavy winter coat she can stay comfortable at much lower temperatures. She can also adjust by increasing her metabolic rate to increase heat production, which also increases her appetite. But if she gets too cold, heat loss and cold stress reduces appetite and efficiency of feed conversion since the body's metabolism is adversely affected (mammals must maintain a constant body temperature to keep up the proper metabolic processes).

Critical temperature


Kaldakur

If a cow has good winter hair, she does fine until temperatures drop below 20 to 30 degrees F. Below that, she compensates for heat loss by increasing energy intake; she must increase heat production to maintain body temperature. Healthy cows, in average body condition and acclimated to cold weather have a "lower critical temperature point" (point at which maintenance requirements increase and you need to feed them more) of about 20 degrees F. Lower critical temperature is defined as the lower limit of the "comfort zone" (below which the animal must increase its rate of heat production; it's also the temperature at which performance begins to decline as temperatures become colder).

For example, a 1100 pound pregnant cow needs 11.2 lbs. of TDN per day when temperatures are above freezing. If temperature drops 20 degrees below her lower critical temperature, she needs 20 percent more MN or 2.2 more lbs. of digestible nutrients. To supply that, you can feed her 3 lbs. of grain, or 5 lbs. of hay containing 50 percent TDN.

Wind or moisture makes effective temperature (the temperature felt by the body) lower than the temperature on the thermometer. You must figure the wind chill factor when arriving at amount of degrees below a cow's critical temperature point. There are many wind chill charts available. Kansas State University researchers have developed a wind chill index for cattle. For example, a 10 mile per hour wind at 20 degrees has the same effect as a temperature of 9 degrees with no wind. If the temperature drops to zero (or equivalent of zero, with wind chill) energy requirement of a cow increases between 20 percent and 30 percent - about one percent for each degree of coldness below her critical temperature. Cattle can't eat enough extra feed to compensate for heat production loss at minus 50 degrees F with wind chill; they need windbreaks under these conditions to reduce heat loss during winter storms. During severely cold weather, cattle also need bedding to insulate them from the frozen ground, which will help conserve their body heat.

Cows with normal winter hair coats need about one third more feed when exposed to wind chill temperatures at or near zero. Critical temperature for any cow or calf will vary according to hair coat, moisture conditions, age, size of animal, fatness (fat under the satin is good insulation against cold), length of time exposed to adverse conditions, and amount of wind. Feedlot steers, with their extra fat and access to windbreaks, are usually more tolerant of cold weather than grazing cows. Cold stress is also less severe if a storm is brief, compared with the chill and stress of continuous bad weather. Temperatures and wind chill charts (in figuring cold stress) are based on 24 hour average temperatures.

A rough rule of thumb to compensate for cold is to increase the amount of feed (energy source) by one percent for each two degrees F of cold stress. For thin cows with poor hair coats, or in wet conditions (wet hair coat) figure a one percent increase for each degree of temperature drop. A wet storm is worse than dry cold. Wet hair loses insulating quality; the cow will chill sooner. When hair coat is wet, the critical temperature is about 59 degrees F.

When dry, the hair is fluffy and traps body heat in tiny air spaces between the hairs, creating a blanket of insulation between the cow's body and the cold air. Hair tends to shed water fairly well for awhile, but once it gets completely wet and lies flatter, its insulating quality is lost and the cow is more easily chilled. A cow can suffer more cold stress in wet weather than in dry cold.

With severe wind chill and wet conditions, it is impractical or impossible to feed a cow enough additional energy to provide the calories she needs to keep warm (and inadvisable, if you are using grain to increase energy; that much grain would cause digestive disorders). It's better to provide windbreaks to offset the wind chill, and to have the cows in adequate body condition to provide stored energy for these critical times.

Many stockmen overlook the effects of wet weather, because the temperature isn't really cold. Yet a cow's nutrient requirements may be greatly affected, since she has more trouble keeping warm (try soaking your coat in water and see how poorly it insulates you from the wind or cold temperatures). Cows who have lost weight or who are losing weight are very susceptible to cold or wet weather stress, so keep track of body condition as you winter your cows.

LDCB News

LDCB Preservation Certificates

LDCB Certificates of Recordation are being issued to every preservation dexter in our member's herds. All Dexters registered as legacy horned & traditional horned in the Legacy Database are eligible for this program. Contact Karrie for more information. LegacyBreeders@gmail.com

LDCB Brochures

Attending a Dexter Show or Event? Legacy Dexter Cattle Breeders now has a trifold brochure and leaflet available to our members. Spread the Word about our wonderful breed and the "Only Breeders Group dedicated to preservation".

LDCB Decals

Coming Soon! Thanks to our fellow member SA Walkup's great idea, LDCB will soon be offering vinyl decals (roughly 6") to our membership. Stick them to your farm signs, vehicles, trailers, or wherever you want to show your support for preservation.

PDCA – A Change in Leadership

In 2017, the PDCA experienced major change, including the election of a new President, Vice president, Treasurer, Secretary and several new Directors. The PDCA also announced they now fully accept Legacy registrations and testing. Additionally, big change came to the PDCA certified program. In the past, animals had to be proven PHA and Chondro free. This had negative consequences for those breeders that value Chondro animals. The new program now requires that the status of PHA and Chondro be proven but does not discriminate against positive or negative status.
New leadership is including LDCB and other breeders' groups with space in the Journal and on the PDCA web site www.dexterstoday.com/regional-clubs.

LDCB Banner

Coming Soon!

2018 Legacy Dexter Cattle Show

Mark your calendar now and be sure to attend this great opportunity to showcase our rare heritage breed! Updates will be posted on the website along with the schedule and class list.

Open to all registered Dexters

Legacy, PDCA and ADCA members invited!

A Standard Description of the Dexter

Chondro bull – Walnut Lawn Shadwell

Chondro cow - Odetta of Sussex

Non-chondro bull - SF Ferdinand

Non-chondro cow - Legacy Blue Tully

1. The Dexter is essentially both a milk-producing and a beef making breed, and both these points should, in judging, be taken into consideration.

2. Colour.--Bulls.-Whole black or whole red (the two colours being of equal merit). A little white on organs of generation not to disqualify an animal which answers all other essentials of this standard description. Cows.-Whole black or whole red (the two colours being of equal merit). Black with white on the udder, or red with white on bag. The extension of the white of the udder slightly along the inside of flank or under side of the belly, or a little white on end of tail, shall not be held to disqualify an animal which answers all other essentials of this standard description.

3. Head AND Neck.--Head short and broad, with great width between the eyes, and tapering gracefully towards muzzle, which should be large, with wide distended nostrils. Eyes bright, prominent, and of a kind and placid expression. Neck short, deep and thick, and well set into the shoulders, which, when viewed in front, should be wide, showing thickness through the heart, the breast coming well forward.

Horns.-These should be short and moderately thick, springing well from the head, with an inward and slightly upward curve.

4. Body.--Shoulders of medium thickness, full and well filled in behind, hips wide, quarters thick and deep and well sprung, flat and wide across loins, well ribbed up, straight underline, udder well forward, and broad behind with well-placed teats of moderate size, legs short (especially from knee to fetlock), strong, and well placed under body, which should be as close to the ground as possible. Tail well set on and level 'with back.

5. Skin.--The skin should be soft and mellow, and handle well, not too thin, hair fine, plentiful and silky.

6. Dexter Bulls should not exceed 900 Lbs., live weight, when in breeding condition. Dexter Cows should not exceed 800 Lbs., live weight, when in breeding condition.

It should be noted that this early standard describes Dexters with Chondrodysplasia (dwarfism). It should also be noted that at the time the standard was written genetic testing was not available, and dun had not been distinguished as being its own color, separate from red.