



LIMOUSIN

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Porencephaly in Limousin Cattle

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2026

Introduction

Porencephaly is a neurological condition where cysts or cavities form within the foetal brain. In calves, it results in abnormal neurological function from birth & typically results in the loss of the calf.

The condition can be caused by multiple factors, including viruses (e.g. Bluetongue disease, BVD), vascular problems, toxins/environmental factors and genetic causes.

Recently, APHA and its research partners have found Porencephaly in Limousin cattle resulting from genetic causes and the following Frequently Asked Questions are in relation to this.

1. What are the symptoms of Porencephaly?

Signs of the condition are typically present at birth or shortly thereafter. Affected calves may display:

- Blindness or impaired vision
- Disorientation or abnormal behaviour
- Lack of coordination
- Weakness
- No suck reflex
- Calves often described as “dummy calves”

ADVICE TO BREEDERS

- These symptoms are shared with other conditions, including Bluetongue Virus (BTV).
- Suspected incidents should be reported to local vets who should discuss the matter with APHA via the DEFRA Rural Services helpline.

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2. Is Porencephaly Inherited?

Yes, inheritance of a single recessive gene is one of the causes of Porencephaly.

Genes occur in pairs, with one copy inherited from the sire and the other from the dam:

- **IF** one copy of the gene is inherited from a parent (i.e. heterozygous), the calf **MAY** be a carrier but will **NOT** be affected by the condition itself.
- **IF** two copies of the gene are inherited (i.e. homozygous) – one will be from one parent, and one from the other parent – the calf **WILL** be affected by the condition.

3. How serious is the condition?

Affected calves (homozygous, inheriting two copies) are unlikely to thrive and are typically euthanised.

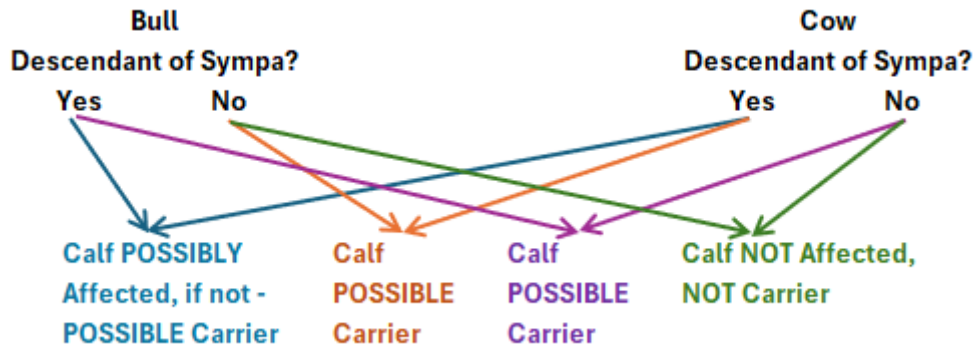
4. How common is this in Limousins?

The Society understands less than 15 cases have been identified through the research to date.

5. Is the condition linked to specific bloodlines?

Investigations undertaken by APHA and its research partners have indicated that there is a link between the condition and animals descending from **Sympa 48-01-006-969**.

- Animals with Sympa on one side of their pedigree (i.e. **EITHER** on the sire side **OR** on the dam side), **MAY** be **CARRIERS**, but not affected by the condition themselves.
- Animals with Sympa on both sides of their pedigree (i.e. on the sire side **AND** the dam side) **MAY** be affected. If not affected, they **MAY** still be **CARRIERS**.



IT IS IMPORTANT to note that not all animals with Sympa in their pedigree will be carriers.

ADDITIONALLY the research is ongoing and it is not yet known whether additional family lines, beyond Sympa, may also be implicated.

ADVICE TO BREEDERS

- Based on the information available at this stage, the advice to members is **NOT** to cease breeding from descendants of Sympa.
- Rather, members are advised to take a balanced and informed approach by avoiding mating animals where Sympa is an ancestor of both the bull **AND** the cow to be mated.
- This approach will help minimise the risk of producing affected animals, as such cases arise only where an animal inherits the gene from both the sire **AND** the dam.
- Animals bred **EITHER** by a bull **OR** a cow that has Sympa in their pedigree may be carriers themselves but will not be affected by the condition.
- **It is important to note that NOT ALL animals with Sympa-bred ancestors will be carriers.**

6. Is a DNA test available?

Currently, no DNA test for Porencephaly is available.

The Society is working quickly with Weatherbys to develop a DNA test, which would become part of the suite of bovine genetic condition tests offered to members.

The timelines will depend on the conclusion of APHA's research and the lab development/validation. Updates will be released as soon as further information becomes available.

7. Is this condition limited to the Limousin breed?

At this time, the genetic cases under investigation relate to Limousin cattle. There is no evidence currently suggesting a widespread issue across other breeds.

8. Is reporting mandatory?

The Society is strongly encouraging voluntary reporting to ensure accurate data collection. Report to vets in the first instance, particularly if Bluetongue Virus is suspected (since the symptoms are similar). Early reporting will assist APHA's surveillance work and help responsible management.

9. Will pedigree registration or sale rules be changed?

There are currently no changes to registration procedures. If this position changes based on scientific findings, members will be informed promptly.

10. Will carrier animals need to be declared in the future?

This will depend on research findings and the availability of a validated DNA test. Any future policy decisions will be clearly communicated and made in the best interests of the breed.

11. Why are members being informed now?

Awareness of the condition was shared recently with the Society by APHA. Communication with members has been as soon as possible, allowing for APHA confidentiality requirements, for the Council of Management to consult internally and for early progress to be made on a testing and management strategy with Weatherbys.

12. Will updates be provided?

Yes. The Society is committed to keeping members informed and will provide updates as further information becomes available through our work with APHA and Weatherbys.

13. Where can I get help?

If you do not have access to the Taurus website and require assistance in planning matings, or for any other enquiry, please get in touch with the Society office by email or telephone; details are below.