

Boosters and barriers

- Understanding attitudes to health screening

Helle Friis Proschowsky¹, Camilla Sichlau Bruun¹, Merete Fredholm¹, Lars Gårn Hansen² & Peter Sandøe^{1,2}

1. Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

2. Department of Food and Resource Economics,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark



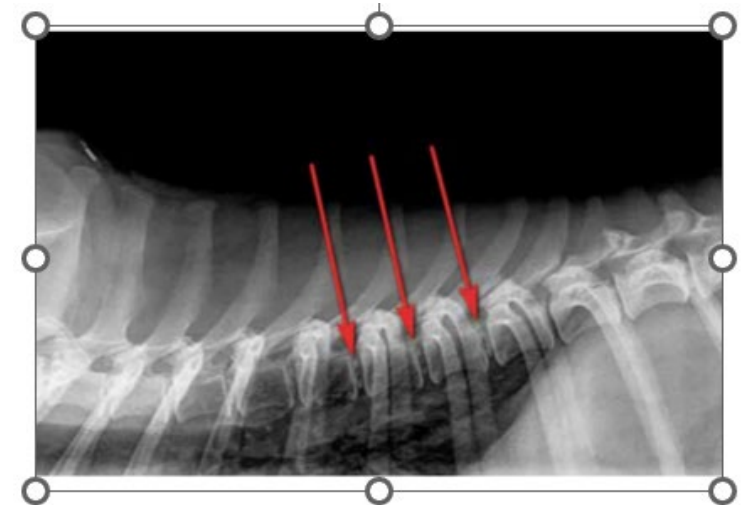
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Breeding programs

- Recognized part of the pedigree dog world since the 1960'ties beginning with screening for hip dysplasia
 - A huge number of dog are screened for hereditary diseases every year
- In recent years, National legislation has been implemented in several countries including Denmark
 - Since July 1., 2025 all breeding dogs in Denmark – pedigree as well as non-pedigree - of specific breeds must be screened for:
 - Hip- and elbow dysplasia
 - Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS)
 - Myxomatous Mitral Valve Disease and Syringomyelia
 - Intervertebral Disk Disease

New non-pedigree breeders are required to enroll their dogs in screening programs

- Which general factors are important to ensure support?
- A breeding program implemented in 2009 for Dachshund breeders within the Danish Kennel Club was used as a study case
- X-ray of the spine and screening for calcifications in the intervertebral discs between 2-4 years
 - The number of calcified discs vary between dogs
 - Strong correlation to risk of disc herniation
 - High heritability for number of calcified discs



Jensen VF, Beck S, Christensen KA, Arnbjerg J: J Am Vet Med Assoc 2008, 233:1090–1095

The study had two parts

- Quantitative questionnaire study
 - Perception of health, experience with disc herniation, attitudes towards the breeding program and the new legislation
 - Aiming at breeders as well as non-breeders
 - A total of 2,197 complete responses were received
 - 492 breeders (22%) and 1,713 non-breeders (78%)
- Qualitative interview study
 - 17 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from the Dachshund breeding community
 - Breed Club representatives, breeders, veterinarians

Three themes were identified

To ensure support, the following three aspects were important:

1. Related to the disease – *is it necessary to screen?*
 - Prevalence, severity, inheritance, personal experience
2. Related to the screening method – *is it acceptable?*
 - Validity, impartiality, trust, cost, risk and distance to specialists)
3. Related to the expected outcome – *is it efficient?*
 - Evaluation of effect

Aspects related to the disease – *is it necessary to screen?*

- The majority (70%) of the dog owners agreed that disc herniation is the most important health problem in dachshunds
 - More than half (64%) worried that their dog would get a herniated disc
- Still, breed loyalty was high
 - Only 16% stated that the risk of disk herniation had an impact on their motivation to get a new Dachshund
 - When asked about plans to acquire a new dog, 66% answered “Yes” and 95% of these would choose a dachshund again
- Nearly every third (31%) of the questionnaire respondents had experienced disc herniation in their own dog(s)
 - In line with findings from the literature
 - Still, both the prevalence and the need for the breeding program was questioned

Aspects related to the screening method - *is it acceptable?*

- Conflicts in the Breed Club concerning the breeding program
 - Scientific background, X-ray evaluations, implementation and management
- Respondents who stated that they "Agree" or "Strongly agree":
 - "I trust the scientific background of the screening program"
 - Breeders: 75%, Non-breeders: 83 %
 - "I trust the accuracy of the X-ray evaluations"
 - Breeders: 75%, Non-breeders: 84%
 - "I trust the politicians/authorities who formulated the new legislation"
 - Breeders: 62%, Non-breeders: 72%
 - "The new legislation will improve the health of Danish dogs"
 - Breeders: 77%, Non-breeders: 87%

So, despite apparent conflicts, broad agreement and support!

Aspects related to the screening method - *is it acceptable?*

- Overall, the level of trust was high
 - The breeders had significantly less trust
- More at stake
 - Their dogs, that are either approved or disqualified for breeding
- Transparency and proper management must be prioritized
 - Wish for central administration of screening by the Danish authorities
- Few people are sometimes responsible for a lot of the “public noise”



Aspects related to the expected outcome – *is it efficient?*

- > 90 % finds it important or very important
 - Evaluating the efficiency of breeding programs have not been prioritized adequately
 - Lack on this count as a serious barrier
- Need to develop tools to monitor progress – or lack thereof
 - Implemented from the start
 - Not an easy task
- Prevalence of disc herniation treatments is not necessarily a valid measure – could be caused by changes in:
 - Diagnostics methods, surgical procedures or treatment recommendations
 - Breed popularity
 - Economic fluctuations in society
 - Level of health insurances etc.

Boosters and barriers

- Data and statistics are not enough!
- The feelings and emotions related to being a breeder have – at least to some extent – been neglected
- This became evident – especially from the interviews



Emotions – when a future breeding dog gets a bad health score

"I actually don't think that money is that important. I think there are some emotional things in it that are incredibly difficult to understand, and that I was not aware of from the beginning (...)

I think it's your whole identity and life – so for some of these people, it's their life to be breeders and go to dog shows every weekend and have puppies, and then they've had a winning dog – and of course the money – but I think it's much more like prestige.

In other words, that this fine dog will not be the big breeding dog that you had dreamed of."

Emotions – is there even a language in the dog world for expressions of feelings like loss or grief?

"It's also about how conscious you are as a breeder, about what it is that pulls you in one direction or the other. Those were the conversations my husband and I had years ago, when we dropped our entire line and had to say, well, what the hell is this? Why is it so difficult? What is happening in us?"

But if you don't have anyone to have that conversation with, if there's no one to mirror you because you don't dare to say it out loud, or if you're not really emotionally in a place where you can go into it yourself, then it becomes difficult."

Conclusions – boosters and barriers

- Breeding programs must be perceived as both "*necessary*", "*acceptable*" and "*efficient*" to get support
 - Involve the use of digital tools
- It is important to recognize the personal and emotional consequences for breeders when new breeding programs are implemented
- Establish a common understanding based on respect, and involving fields other than the natural sciences
- Otherwise, there is a risk that new health initiatives will "hit the barrier"
- This will be of no benefit for the dogs

Thank you

- Peter Sandøe
- Merete Fredholm
- Camilla Sichlau Bruun
- Lars Gårn Hansen
- Knowledge Centre for Animal Welfare, The Danish Veterinary, Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Agency (funding)
- Danish Kennel Club
- Danish Dachshund Breed Club
- Danish Hunting Dog Registry
- Danish Dachshund owners and breeders

