



2026 Update on Reporting Developmental Conditions in Dairy Cows: We need your input

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Gestational and Developmental Conditions in Dairy Calves

Gestational and developmental conditions in calves continue to increasingly affect Canada's dairy population. These conditions include early embryonic loss, stillbirth, unexplained disease, limb deformities, and abnormalities in organ development. These events may have genetic causes that are passed from parent to offspring (genetic conditions), but they can also be influenced by non-genetic factors such as nutrition,

environmental stressors, and farm-specific circumstances.

Despite their impact on animal welfare and herd productivity, Canada does not yet have a comprehensive and accessible system for tracking developmental and gestational issues in dairy herds. This limits the sector's ability to identify emerging issues, differentiate genetic from environmental causes, and coordinate surveillance and prevention strategies. A rapid response system could serve as an important economic tool by enabling the early detection of genetic conditions, supporting informed breeding decisions and helping farmers build healthier, more productive herds.

Complete the survey

Help shape the design of a reporting system and ultimately reduce the frequency of genetic conditions! Please complete the survey: [Here](#)

What we heard from producers so far

The ongoing survey has been conducted to better understand on-farm experiences with developmental and gestational conditions and perspectives on reporting them. To date, 130 responses have been collected, most of them from dairy producers.



Overall, producers recognize the importance of reporting. However, current reporting options do not consistently align with producer realities

on farm.

Barriers to reporting

- Not knowing how or where to report
- Reporting takes too much time or effort
- Uncertainty about whether a condition is genetic
- Privacy concerns
- The perception that early calf loss is a normal occurrence

What Would Improve Reporting?

Producers were clear about what they need. A reporting system should be simple, accessible (website, app, or existing farm software), and flexible enough to fit real farm workflows.

Strong producer preference	Implication for system design
Simple and quick to use	Minimize data entry and make reporting possible in a few clear steps.
Easy to access	Offer access through a website, mobile app, or existing farm software.
Flexible and privacy-aware	Include options for anonymous reporting where appropriate.

If these improvements were made, 93% of respondents said they would likely use a reporting system.

Sample collection and support

Comfort with collecting and shipping biological samples can influence whether a producer or farm employee reports a complication. Samples

from the affected animal and its dam are needed to help determine whether the condition is genetic and to inform prevention strategies. Encouragingly, majority of producers are comfortable collecting blood (87%) or tissue samples (95%).

Additional support requested

- Standardized sample collection kits
- Clear instructions or training
- Optional support from a veterinarian

Many respondents support veterinary involvement, while also noting that cost and availability can be limiting.

Diagnosing and Reporting Remain Limited

Although these conditions are widely experienced, relatively few cases are formally diagnosed or reported:

- 87% of the farms have experienced gestational or developmental conditions
 - 73% did not determine the cause
 - 70% did not report the case

This highlights a clear gap in both diagnosis and reporting. Improving reporting will help the dairy sector understand the conditions occurring on farm, identify underlying causes more quickly, and support more informed breeding and management decisions.

Examples of conditions experienced on farm:

- Early pregnancy loss or stillbirth
- Dwarfism
- Heart conditions
- Unexplained death of a seemingly healthy calf

We want to hear from you!

Do these early results reflect your experience?

The survey is ongoing, and more input from Canadian farmers is essential to design a system that works for producers, veterinarians, and the dairy sector as a whole! Please participate: [Here](#)

Additionally, we are actively accepting reports and collecting samples. If you are experiencing gestational or developmental conditions on your farm, please reach out to PhD candidate Gabriella Condello (gcondell@uoguelph.ca) at the University of Guelph.

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