

September 7, 2009

Marvin D. Nelson Jr. Memorial Fund for Brittany DNA Studies

Brittany DNA Studies have been conducted at University of California-Davis, at the Center for Companion Animal Health (CAAH) Section of Genetics since 2004. Thanks to the enthusiastic involvement of the Brittany community, over 2100 Brittany DNA samples have been catalogued in the DNA Canine Repository. More than any other breed collected at UCD. The program has been supported in part by interest earned from the Marvin D Nelson, Jr. Endowment. We have been extremely fortunate in that the majority of research and administrative financial support has been contributed by the CCAH. Current economic conditions involving the University of California precludes the Center supporting Brittany DNA Studies at the same level of aid given during the past 4 years. There is continued strong support in providing a geneticist, her lab and staff.

Dr. Danika Bannasch DVM, PhD, Professor of Population Health and Reproduction, School of Veterinary Medicine and her associates are now heading the Brittany DNA Studies Program in her lab at the CCAH. Dr. Mark Neff left the program and his entire staff has relocated to other areas, including Katy Robertson, the original coordinator for the program, however, still at the Veterinary Genetics Diagnostic Lab at UCD.

Select Brittany DNA samples from individuals with birth defects are requested by Dr. Bannasch upon completion of a questionnaire and subsequent collection of DNA samples. Appropriate research samples collected during the past 4 years are available to initiate this study. She is studying birth defects that include cleft palate, umbilical hernia and cryptorchidism (undescended testicles). Contact her at 530-752-8728, dlbannasch@ucdavis.edu if you have pups with these birth defects and wish to submit DNA samples. Additional details about her requests are submitted in a separate communication

Brittany DNA Studies continues in need of monetary gifts to support the program to benefit genetic understanding of our breed. The Marvin D. Nelson, Jr. Memorial Fund was set up as an endowment, in which the principle cannot be spent. The interest earned from the endowment has been the source of funds for genetic research, along with the CCAH contributions which, as previously mentioned, have declined. Our goal had been, and still is, to support an annual research program solely from the interest on the endowment. But, we currently haven't hit that level. We are fortunate. Dr. Bannasch is enthusiastic about including the Brittany Breed in her research; therefore, work in DNA studies will continue to benefit our dogs.

So, what do we need to do now? There are two funding goals:

- 1) Support Dr. Bannasch immediately in her current work to assist in Brittany Birth Defect Genetic Research. Checks should be made out to the Regents University of California, with a note attached for Brittany DNA Studies, Bannasch Lab. Send gifts to Dr. Neils Pedersen, Director CCAH, or the Development Office, School of Veterinary Medicine, UCD, Davis, CA 95616.

2) Grow the endowment so that it will eventually support an annual project. Estate planning is one method that supporters of our breed can leave a legacy that will continue improving the Brittany through health research. We need to encourage fund raising, and all large and small donations to the fund. Already two persons have indicated that, upon their death, the Fund will acquire a sum in excess of one-third of a million dollars. We urge all enthusiasts interested in bettering the breed through DNA research to strongly consider donations to the Marvin D Nelson Jr Fund by estate planning.

An International Brittany DNA Studies Committee has been organized to assist in these efforts. It consists of Brittany members across the Nation including Norway and Canada, Chaired by Steve Ralph.

Submitted by Gordon Theilen DVM
Member ABC Health and Genetic Defects Committee
ghtheilen@ucdavis.edu, 707-678-8416