

ZO Suffolks  
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Niederkleen, den 23. 02.2005  
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## Open Letter

Dear Sheep Breeders, and especially Suffolk Breeders

In the spring of 2004 a **genetic defect** occurred in the sheep herd "ZO Suffolks" of Klaus Textor, in Langgöns-Niederkleen / Hessen. It was detected here for the first time in this herd. The **defect** is well known from the US, where it is called Spiderlamb- Syndrome.

Right away I began to double check the Diagnosis, to make sure that it is true. DNA-testing was done first at vita-tech Laboratories in Canada, and four of the lambs were brought to the University of Giessen Veterinary Department ( Prof.Dr. Bostedt; Prof.Dr. Reinacher and Dr.Hecht) to do the patho-histological part as well as to proof the DNA part over again.

At the same time, when all these activities started, the Hessen Sheep Breeders Association as well as the state officials for sheep breeding were informed about the problem.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> 2004, a 100 page large, power point assisted presentation about the Spider Syndrome was held in front of the state officials (sheep breeding Officers) as well as about half of the Suffolk Breeders of the state. The genetic defect was shown to them. Clinical as well as breeding and law questions were talked about.

In the first half of September the SLS (Spider-Lamb-Syndrome) again was talked about in front of all 15 German state officers for sheep breeding. The presentation lasted almost two hours. This time the official 15 representatives of all 15 states, sheep breeders (of Meat Sheep Breeds), also attended at the hearing.

I pointed out that there is a need for the breeding officers to react immediately. The main task for the future will be to cut off the further spread of the defect Gene within the Suffolk-population as well as within the rest of the breeds. It was made clear that the only sufficient way of control will be the DNA testing of at least all Suffolk rams.

The very goal should be to have all rams tested from the day on. Under special consideration also all the Suffolk rams going to the German Elite Show and Sale in Alsfeld mid March 2005 need to be tested.

Since the Spiderlamb Syndrome is a semi-lethal defect with a very high relevance in terms of animal welfare and health as well as in animal breeding the presentation was also held at the annual meeting of veterinary practitioners in Nürnberg on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2004.

This was to show to the veterinarians how the defect looks like.

**So what happened since then ?** >>>> **Nothing** ! <<<<<

The way it looks not even all the Suffolk Breeders have been informed by their officials. There was no official letter sent to all the other sheep breeders as well, to make them aware of the problem and the situation.

The main magazine „Deutsche Schafzucht“, the Megaphone of the sheep breeders associations VDL ( Vereinigung Deutscher Landesschafzuchtverbände) remained silent.

Is there an aim to get rid of the problem by not talking about it ?

Is there anything to hide or to keep under cover, or is there anything that needs to be pushed to an unknown future ?

What is the reason to only keep certain breeders informed, where as others don't even get the chance to know the problem they need to fight ?

Although facing the danger for a further “genetic contamination of the German and EU sheep population” there seem to be no worry’s to auction Suffolk breeding stock in Germany, or to eventually export it to other european countries, **without** having it **tested for Spider Gene (Spider- Lamb- Syndrom)**.

**What else must a Sheep Breeder know about Spider Lamb Syndrom and how do Spiderlambs look like? Very often they look like this!**



**How wide has the defect spread allready , and since when is the Gene within the Suffolk population?**

- a) In some breeding stocks one will have to accept 30-50% carriers within a herd.
- b) The Gene very likely is in the population since 1990.
- c) What lines the carriers come from and what herds are most suspicious can’t told yet.
- d) Also other breeds seem to be involved allready.

**What can the Sheep Breeder do to keep his herd out of trouble?**

While purchasing breeding stock, allways ask for the Spiderlamb Gene Test when buying Suffolk-Sheep within Europe.

Have all your Suffolk rams DNA tested immidiatly!

**Where do I get more Information ?**

The following Homepage informs you [www.spiderlamb.textor-online.de](http://www.spiderlamb.textor-online.de) .

On that page you find the Presentation of SLS as it has been held in Nürnberg in November. Additionally you find a few useful “Links” with international information.

Yours

Klaus Textor