



# BMDCA Info Series

Working with the BMDCA & BGF for the Welfare of the BMD 2020 #23

**Introduction** ► Congratulations on being part of the Bernese Mountain Dog community! Making the decision to bring a Berner into one's family is a big one that comes with the joys and responsibilities of conscientious dog ownership. Within the US, Berners and their owners are supported by many interconnected organizations that are dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of our breed. **All** Berner owners can use and benefit from information offered by these interconnected resources, but owners also share in the responsibility of helping these organizations be successful in fulfilling their objectives. This includes owners who love their companion dogs and those who breed, show in conformation, and compete in performance events.

**Berner-Garde Foundation** ► The Berner-Garde Foundation ("BGF" or Berner-Garde – [www.bernergarde.org](http://www.bernergarde.org)) was incorporated in 1995 to collect, maintain, and disseminate information about genetic diseases observed in the Bernese Mountain Dog. BGF is an independent, tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization with its own Board of Directors. Its mission is "... to ensure that all Bernese Mountain Dogs (BMD) have a long and healthy lifespan of twelve to fourteen years." In addition, the BGF established the BMD DNA and Tissue Repository in 2006 with the support of the BMDCA and in partnership with Michigan State University. This repository is a valuable resource for health researchers. It supports the mission of BGF by aiding research efforts to identify genes that impact the expression of canine diseases and assisting in the development of improved diagnostic and treatment options.

**BGF Health Database** ► The BG database contains health, pedigree, and other information that has been compiled over many years from voluntary submissions received from owners, other international BMD databases, and public information sources, including the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). The information in the Berner-Garde database is publicly available online and free of charge to everyone. Puppy buyers, owners, and breeders can use the database for a wide variety of purposes, as can veterinarians and health researchers, especially those who are working to reduce genetic disease.

**Berner-Garde needs your help in continuing to build its database.** One of its goals is to connect with every BMD owner so that they understand the critical role they play in creating and maintaining health records for the BMDs they own. This is a vitally important commitment that consists of entering important health information throughout each dog's life, including the date and underlying cause(s) of death. Responsible breeders enter litter information in the BGF database. Then they will coach their buyers to maintain these health records after each puppy goes

to its forever home.

Entering data into the BGF database is simple and quick. To get started follow these easy steps:

1. Go to <http://www.bernergarde.org>. From the homepage, click on the Database option on the top menu bar.
2. From there, click on the button that says "Click here to access the database".
3. Find and click on the "Submit Data" button (on the left hand side). From the submissions page you can elect to enter information about yourself, your dog, or your litter, if you are a breeder. There are links on this page that help walk you through the submission process. Additionally, you can save your personal settings so submitting future data will be even faster and easier.
4. If you have questions during the submission process, find and click on the button titled "Operators". This brings you to a page that lists resources with e-mail addresses. These individuals are available to help you with the entry process.
5. To determine whether your Berner already has a database record, and an assigned BGF number, click on the "Dogs" button, which also is located in the left hand navigation panel on the BGF Database Welcome Page. Enter your dog's AKC registered name and/or other information listed on the electronic form to see what the query yields. If your dog has not been entered in the Berner-Garde database a number will be issued and a record created after the first data submission. Likewise, an owner record will be created for you during the initial data entry process. As noted in the step above, you can save your personal settings so future updates for you and your Berner will be a snap and can be done directly through the Dog and People detail pages.

If you need assistance at any time, a BGF operator will guide you through the process and is available by email to answer your questions.

So striking but what can be learned about each through the Berner-Garde database?



In addition to helping create an ever-enriched database for the breeder and scientific communities, there are many Berner-Garde database features and functionalities that you might like to use as an owner. Many of these are described in a companion **Info Sheet – Learning About BMDs Through Berner-Garde**, which can be found on the BMDCA website. Take a minute to familiarize yourself with the tools that are available to you and your veterinarian.

**BMD DNA and Tissue Repository** ► Finally, as part of its mission to improve the health and longevity of our Berners, in 2006, the Berner-Garde Foundation and Michigan State University (MSU), with support from the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA), established a repository that collects, stores, and maintains DNA and tumor tissue samples from Bernese Mountain Dogs. The goal of the Repository is to facilitate research on genetic diseases affecting the breed. The samples collected, along with the health and pedigree information maintained in the Berner-Garde database, will assist researchers who, in the past, have been hampered by the lack of samples, and insufficient medical and pedigree information. All BMD owners can help support this cause. To learn more about the BMD DNA and Tissue Repository and how to provide samples go to: <http://bernergarde.org/home/repository.aspx>.

The Berner-Garde Foundation continues to do so much for our breed and all who have Berners – pet owners, those who compete in conformation and performance sports, and breeders alike – can play a part. Join in building the BG database and Repository. Become a BGF supporter today!

### **Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America**

**(BMDCA)** ► The BMDCA is recognized as the official national breed club by the American Kennel Club. It was formed in 1968 to bring together BMD owners and breeders from across the country. From its original 33 members, the Club grew slowly, reaching 100 members by 1971. Today the BMDCA is well established with over 1,200 members. In addition, the BMDCA has recognized a large number of regional clubs across the country that allow local owners to more easily participate in events with other Berner enthusiasts at locations close to them.

The BMDCA membership is very diverse. There are many long-time ambassadors of the breed, as well as newcomers, who are interested in learning and getting involved. Some of these devoted pet owners are breeders, others are active in competition (conformation and performance events), or community services such as therapy dog work. The common thread that unites this diverse group is their **love for the breed**. All too often “pet” owners view dog clubs as only serving “show people”. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like other national breed clubs, the BMDCA exists to protect and advance the well-being and interests of the breed. To fulfill this mandate, the Club focuses extensively on education for all who are interested in Bernese Mountain Dogs. The BMDCA and regional BMD clubs offer many valuable, easily accessible resources.

Through ongoing surveys over the years, the BMDCA has researched why its members join and remain active in the Club. The explanations describing the **value** of membership are many but the most prevalent and significant continue to be:

- desire and ability to protect the breed;
- opportunities to connect with others;
- information/education about the breed.

In addition to the value of membership, the **benefits** of BMDCA membership are many but a brief list includes:

- An annual subscription to **The Alpenhorn**, which is the official, quarterly publication of the BMDCA and contains a broad collection of articles on diverse topics of interest to the pet owner as well as to those who engage in competitions and breeding.
- Eligibility for participation in/on/for:
  - **BMDCA Breeder Mentor Program**, designed for responsible BMD owners who want to become or who are currently novice breeders;
  - **BMDCA On-line Breeder Referral Program** as a BMDCA member/breeder;
  - **Futurity**, which encourages the breeding of the best possible Bernese Mountain Dogs and rewards the breeders for their efforts;
  - Committees, projects, and task forces and to become involved in the leadership of the Club;
  - BMDCA awards and titles that are unique to the breed and recognized in the Club’s **Yearbook**.

But even if you don’t become a member of the BMDCA you can still benefit from the Club in many ways, which include:

- Attending the BMDCA National Specialty, which offers something for every Berner enthusiast and is the home of Berner University (BU). BU educational programs span the gamut from Berner health, history, breeding, rescue, nutrition, performance activities, and more, and are for the newcomer as well as for the experienced owner.
- Keeping abreast of upcoming events sponsored by the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs through our calendar - <http://www.bmdca.org/events/calendar.php>
- Networking and making new acquaintances, many of whom might become life-long friends. While your BMD’s breeder should always be a primary source of information, the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs can introduce you to networks and activities that will enrich the experiences that you and your Berner might enjoy.
- Tapping into the vast information found on the BMDCA website, which includes educational and health resources, links to the regional BMD clubs, rescue contacts, and more.

**The BMDCA needs your help as well.** As an all-volunteer organization, it is dependent upon the time, talent, and availability of volunteers to perform its work on behalf of the Club and the breed. While most volunteers are members, all are not. We are in constant need of volunteers for committees, events, and special projects. The skill sets required are varied and run the gamut from those who have dog-related expertise to someone who has general management know-how. Volunteer assignments can be right-sized to fit the interests and needs of the individual. And, through giving and involvement, it’s sometimes amazing the enrichment one receives in return.

**Summary** ► It is often said that you can’t have just one Berner! Related to this “warning,” it is our hope that this wonderful breed will find its way into your heart and create a desire for you to join forces with the Berner community by supporting Berner-Garde and connecting with the BMDCA to collectively help promote the health and welfare of the Bernese Mountain Dog. Every individual can make a difference. To get involved with the BMDCA, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator who is listed on the BMDCA website. And, don’t forget to tap into the resources available through the regional BMD clubs.