

Welcome to the APRIL 2000 edition of the Deer Farmers' Digest, a monthly electronic newsletter published by Deerfarmer.com - The Deer Farmers' Information Network. A copy of ALL the issues of this Digest can be found at <http://digest.deerfarmer.com>

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## 1. THE 4 B's OF SUCCESSFUL MARKETING

If you are raising deer as a business (and not for pets or as a hobby) effective marketing is critical to your profitability. Here are some factors that, if implemented, will contribute to your marketing success.

1. BEING THE BEST – Consumers today expect quality. Mediocrity is not acceptable! You need to be the best in all facets of your business – quality products, quality service and quality after-sales support. Looking after the little things will make you stand out from your competitors.

First, provide the best products. Constantly enhance the quality of your products, whether it is breeding stock, venison, velvet antler, semen or other related products. Be ruthless in culling your inferior animals and getting rid of your inferior products. When demand is high, there is always the temptation to sell that runt or injured animal. Don't do it: in the long run, it will damage your reputation as a supplier of quality products. It is important to implement a continuous improvement program on your farm or ranch. You must constantly be looking for ways to improve your animals and products.

Second, provide the best service. Do everything possible to make it easy for your customers to do business with you. Make it easy for them to find you by being listed in the phone book and appropriate directories. Make it easy for your customers to contact you – by phone, fax, e-mail, and mail. Make it easy for people to get information about your products – informative brochures, catalogues, websites, etc. Make it easy for customers to order and pay – on-line

orders, credit cards, etc. Provide delivery and installation services if appropriate. Reduce the risks to buyers by having satisfaction guarantees. Maintain good records and be willing to share/give these to your customers.

Finally, provide the best after-sales support. Help educate your customers. Be a mentor. Provide them with as much information and assistance as you can via personal advice, brochures, manuals and websites.

Being the best will require commitment, time and effort. However, once you are the best, the rewards will be well worth it.

2. **BRANDING** – Along with being the best, you need to “brand” your products and services. Branding helps you differentiate your products from the crowd. “This isn’t just any whitetail deer, it is a YOURBRAND deer.” Pick a good brand name and trademark it. (For information on how to check and register trademarks over the Internet, visit <http://www.steppingstones.ca/library> and click on “Trademarks and Patents.”) Try and pick a brand name that also has an Internet domain name available (to check on domain name availability, go to <http://www.networksolutions.com>). That way you can create an Internet presence for your brand as well. Once you have a brand name, promote it vigorously and aggressively.

3. **BUNDLING** – This refers to being able to buy all related products and services in one place. If you sell breeding stock to new deer farmers, bundling means you can also sell them feeders, handling equipment, fencing, feed and so on. It makes it easier and more convenient for your customers if they can get everything they need in one place. This also includes bundling related services – “yes, we can build that game fence for you; yes, we not only sell the best semen, but we can also help you inseminate your does.” If customers can get everything they need from you, this gives you a distinct competitive advantage over others.

4. **BONDING** – People like to buy from people, not companies or organizations. Bonding means establishing good relationships with your customers. In the marketing literature, there is much written about “relationship marketing.” This is a fancy term for what businesses used to do before the advent of the superstores and megamarts. Store owners knew their customers by name and a lot about them and their needs/wants. They provided them with personalized and quality service.

Get to know your customers and earn their trust. The number one reason people will buy from you is because they trust you. Earn it! Violate this trust and it is almost impossible to get your reputation back. When dealing with your customers, always be completely honest. Don’t hide anything from them. Keep your promises. Be willing to listen and take immediate steps to address any concerns or complaints. Satisfied customers are the best source of word-of-mouth advertising, which is one of the most effective (and cheapest) forms of marketing. It also works in reverse! Dissatisfied customers will spread the word quickly and could eventually kill your business!

## 2. GENETIC IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

*[Russell Sawchuk wrote this article from notes taken at a presentation by Dr. Cathy Gallivan at the Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer Convention in Red Deer on April 1, 2000.]*

Genetic improvement programs are used to improve the quality and profitability of livestock. These programs involve 4 steps:

- Define breeding objectives
- Record pedigree data
- Perform EPD (Expected Progeny Difference) calculations
- Breed with the best based on EPD

The first step is to define the breeding objectives. The objective may be a single trait (antler size) or multiple traits. Multiple traits may include such things as velvet production, antler size, reproduction, growth rates, carcass traits and longevity. For example, bucks that reach full antler size in three years, compared to five years, will provide a better return on investment. Females that can reproduce for 20 years will be more profitable than does with shorter reproductive cycles. Does that bear twins or triplets consistently are significantly more profitable than animals with single offspring. For venison markets, more weight and leanness are probably desirable traits.

Once breeding objectives have been identified, the next step is to determine the relative importance of each objective. These may differ with the deer species and the target markets for which the animals are being produced. Part of this exercise includes calculation and/or modeling of the costs and returns associated with each objective.

It is critical to differentiate between animal traits and characteristics that are due to genetics and those due to the environment. The higher the heritability factors, the faster the genetic improvement. Based on a review of the research literature, Dr. Gallivan found the heritability of certain deer traits were as follows:

### Reproduction

- Date of fawning (0-14%)
- Twinning of fawns (5-15%)

### Growth

- Birth weight (0-18%) for white-tailed deer
- Birth weight (31-49%) for red deer
- Yearling body weight (58-64%) for white-tailed deer
- Later body weight (48-80%)

### Carcass

- Killing-out weight (68%)

## Antler weight

- Velvet antler weight (43-85%)
- Hard antler weight (71-86%)

## Antler shape

- Points (22-66%) for white-tailed
- Main beam length (47-70%) for white-tailed
- Antler spread (3-43%) for white-tailed
- Basal circumference (80-89%) for white-tailed.

The higher the percentages, the better the odds are that the trait will be passed on to the offspring. Notice that none of the traits is 100% and a few are pretty low. For example, if your buck has a 26 inch antler spread, the odds are only 3 to 43% that his sons will have the same spread. The odds for main beam length and basal circumference are a little better (47 to 89%). This data needs to be kept in mind when buying (and selling!) breeding stock.

Another important factor is genetic correlation. This is a measure of how selection for one trait will affect another trait. The correlation may be positive or negative. A good example of a negative correlation found in most livestock is between growth and reproduction. Animals that have been bred for fast growth rates tend to have lower reproduction rates.

According to Dr. Gallivan, the correlations in deer are favourable to genetic improvement programs. For example, high and positive correlations were found between a) birth and weaning weights; b) velvet antler weights in successive years; c) body weight and antler weight; and d) body weight in females and velvet antler production in males (their sons).

The next step in the genetic improvement program is to measure and record the relevant traits. There are objective measurements, e.g. obtained from scales, tape measures, ultrasound, lasers, etc. There are also subjective measures, such as scoring or rating systems. Objective measures are preferred since they are more precise and usually are standardized.

The measurement of traits can come from several sources. They can come from the parents of the animal, from the animal itself, or from the animal's siblings. However, the most important source of measurement information is from the offspring, as this is what you are trying to predict.

There are several good reasons to record pedigree information. For certain livestock species, it is required to register the animal as being a "purebred." Pedigree information is necessary to avoid inbreeding. Finally, pedigree information is essential for genetic improvement programs. Having data on both sires and dams is preferred, but can work with sires only. DNA testing can help identify parents in certain situations where that data is not known. It is important to have the date of birth as age affects many traits, e.g. weight, size, etc.

Once the data is collected, the next step is to calculate the EPD. The Expected Progeny Difference is "an estimate of the superiority of an animal's offspring, relative to the offspring of an average animal in the population." The advantage of using an EPD is that it offers an objective comparison of animals from different sexes, ages and herds. EPD is calculated from

data on traits, pedigree information and genetic parameters. The complex calculations usually require a computer and appropriate statistical software.

EPDs for the relevant traits are combined into a single numerical index. The EPDs can then be used to rank bucks/bulls/stags from the best to the worst. The semen from animals with the highest EPDs is then used to improve the farmed deer species.

In summary, for a genetic performance program to be implemented in the deer industry, the following requirements must be met.

1. Agree on the desirable traits of deer for specific markets, e.g. breeding, trophy, venison, etc.
2. Collect trait and pedigree data. This means the industry has to agree on standardized data elements, have a significant number of deer farmers collect the data on their animals, and make the data available for analysis and calculation of EPDs.
3. Publish the EPDs and use the best animals to improve specific herds and the industry in general.

This will take a significant amount of effort, work and cooperation. However, unless this initiative is undertaken, serious genetic improvements will only be wishful thinking.

### **3. WHITETAILED WITH BUNNY TAILS**

[By Harold Kriesche from the Deer Ranch at [info@deerranch.com](mailto:info@deerranch.com) ]

**A**fter 12 years of raising deer you start to feel confident in yourself and your knowledge of deer and everything about them. You think you know it all. It is when you get to that point in life that the deer will make a liar out of you.

When we purchased the Deer Ranch there were about 15 whitetails on the ranch. Some appeared to be in-bred. One was a runt and had a very short tail about one inch long. When we started, we began to replace all the stock with clean bloodlines. Two were kept – one was Elizabeth (see last month's Digest) because she was the oldest. The other was a runt doe called Bobtail because she was friendly and was the first to come to the fence for a cracker or slice of carrot. We figured the short tail must be from in-breeding and would never happen again with new stock. Bobtail lived seven years with us and produced many normal fawns before she died.

A couple of years later we had a fawn born that after a week had a bloody tail. Closer examination showed most of the tail was gone. A few stitches and iodine fixed her right up. But the mystery remained as to what happened – maybe a coon or weasel had nipped it off, or a larger deer stepped on it with a sharp hoof. Oh, well, we now have a deer with a bunny tail. Her name at birth was Erin, but she took on the nickname of Bobtail from that day on.

Another two years would go by before we had some answers to this mystery. A whitetail doe named Kaitlin would shed some light when she gave birth to Lucy. About 6 days after Lucy was born, my wife and I were strolling through our park and stopped to watch Kaitlin nurse her fawn. Everything looked normal. Mom was licking the tail as Lucy was getting her milk but then

actually started to chew the tail off! We hollered but the damage was done! Another suture and iodine treatment and we had an answer and a whitetail with a bunny tail again. We now knew the who, but not the why.

Well, next comes a brown bottle-fed doe named Fawnee giving birth to triplet doe fawns. We got to watch the same tail biting but to only one of the three fawns. Why would she single out just one and never bite the tails of the other two?

We now have three deer with bunny tails and wondering what surprise is coming for this year. I am sure my expertise in deer will be shattered again this year by some big brown-eyed doe. Our search as to why this tail biting is happening continues.

#### **4. RAISING FAWNS – EXPERIENCES AT MINISTIK RESEARCH STATION**

**I**n 1998, the Ministik Wildlife Research Station was granted a permit to accept up to 30 whitetail and mule deer fawns orphaned in the province of Alberta. The Station, located about an hour east of Edmonton Alberta Canada, is affiliated with the University of Alberta.

At the recent Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer conference, Barry Irving, Manager of the Station, spoke about their experiences in raising these orphan fawns.

Mr. Irving indicated that the brand of milk-replacer did not seem to matter, even though other users occasionally experienced problems with certain brands, resulting in broken bones, etc. They attribute their success to providing free-choice supplements for the fawns to nibble on right from the beginning.

At Ministik, the fawns were “fed to consumption,” i.e. until they were full. For the first three weeks, the fawns were fed four times a day (not at night). This was reduced to three feedings a day after that. The fawns were weaned at 90 days. Feedings were done using a plastic pail with 10 nipples. This worked well except for a few problem fawns that had to be fed by hand. (I have heard from other deer farmers who have used this method with success as well. It is a viable alternative to the fixed-time, fixed-amount feeding schedule described on our website.)

Mr. Irving made the following observations based on his experiences with bottle feeding at Ministik. Fawns seem to prefer women caretakers compared to men. Don’t panic if a fawn misses an occasional feeding. They can go up to four days without feed and still do fine. Learn to be patient. Every fawn is different and individual. Take time to learn about each one. Keep good records – about every feeding, weight and any health problems.

Ministik lost 12 fawns (about half of their orphan fawns) in 1999 due to a cryptosporidium outbreak. It is now believed that the cryptosporidium was introduced into the deer pen by an infected fawn. Cryptosporidium is a protozoa that is spread via feces, resulting in uncontrollable diarrhea. It is highly contagious and usually fatal. There currently is no known treatment for it. Use of commercial dried cow colostrum seemed to help in a few cases. For a detailed account of this cryptosporidium outbreak, and how it was handled, please see the article at <http://albertadeer.com/library/research/crypto.htm>

## 5. NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATIONS

The North American Deer Farmers Association (NADeFA) recently elected Jo Ann Logan, Honey Hill Deer Farm, Edmont, Oklahoma; Bill Grace, Mustang Creek Ranch, Salado, Texas; Stanley Mayfield, Mayfield Ranch, San Angelo, Texas; and Jim Ray, Venison Acres/World Class Genetics, Silver Springs, Florida, to their Board of Directors. The Board appointed Jill Bryar Wood, Bryarwood Ranch, Wimberley, Texas to a third term as president of the Association. For more information, contact NADeFA at [info@nadefa.org](mailto:info@nadefa.org) or visit their website at <http://www.nadefa.org>

The Alberta White-tail and Mule Deer Association (AWMDA) has elected five new members to their Board of Directors. The new directors are James Sheret from Athabasca, Bryan Taitinger from Barrhead, Marvin Gill from Athabasca, Norm Hanson from Wembley and Jason Marsland from Cochrane. The new president will be chosen at their next Board meeting. For more information, please contact the Association office at [awmda@albertadeer.com](mailto:awmda@albertadeer.com) or visit their website at <http://www.albertadeer.com>

The recently formed Texas Deer Association (TDA) now has its website up and running. There you will find lots of information including free classified ads, a discussion forum, news, links and much more.

Texas Deer Association  
8317 Cross Park Dr., Suite 105  
Austin TX 78754

Phone: 1-512-454-8626  
Fax: 1-512-454-3036  
Web: <http://www.texasdeerassociation.com>

The Saskatchewan Whitetail and Mule Deer Producers Association (SWAMDDPA) has put their newsletter – *Tracking the Industry* – online. For information about what happened at their last convention and for other news about deer farming in Saskatchewan (Canada), go to <http://designetcanada/tracking>

## 6. EVENTS CALENDAR

Here is a list of upcoming events of interest to deer farmers.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ANTLER SCIENCE AND PRODUCT TECHNOLOGY will be held on April 9 to 12 at the Banff Centre, Banff Canada. Contact Sandy Doerr, Conference Secretary at phone (780) 492-9565, fax (780) 492-4265, by e-mail at [aspsymp@afns.ualberta.ca](mailto:aspsymp@afns.ualberta.ca) or visit their website at <http://www.afn.ualberta.ca/ASPTsymp>

EAST CENTRAL BRANCH OF NADeFA (WV, OH, PA, MD, DE) will hold its Spring Meeting on April 15 at Dream Mountain, Bruceton Mills, WV. All deer farmers and prospective deer farmers are invited to attend. You do not have to be a NADeFA member to join us. Contact Thelma Morgan at [tjdoe@aol.com](mailto:tjdoe@aol.com) for more information.

ANTLER'S INTERNATIONAL AUCTION of deer and other species will be held on April 21 at Eldon Missouri. They have about 60 whitetails and 50 red deer already consigned. For more information, phone Jason Engle at 573-642-8772 or visit their website at <http://antlersinternational.com>

CHEMICAL IMMOBILIZATION OF ANIMALS, 16 hour multiple-species workshops by Safe-Capture International will be held at:

April 11-12 Marriott Buffalo, Buffalo, NY  
May 8-9 University of Maryland-Baltimore, Baltimore, MD  
May 16-17 Holiday Inn, Orangeburg (Near NY City)

For a complete list and more information, contact Safe-Capture International at [safecaptur@aol.com](mailto:safecaptur@aol.com) or visit their website at <http://safecapture.com> or phone (608) 767-3071.

THE TEXAS DEER ASSOCIATION REGION 3 MEETING will be held at the Grimes Ranch on May 20. Call J.N. Grimes at 903-586-3648 for more information.

THE TEXAS DEER ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION will be held on September 8 and 9, 2000 at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel on the River Walk. For more information visit the TDA website at <http://www.texasdeerassociation.com>

NADeFA SUMMER SEMINAR will be held on August 5, 2000 at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana PA. Mark it on your calendar. For more information, contact Barbara Fox at [info@nadefa.org](mailto:info@nadefa.org)

WORKSHOPS AT MORGAN'S BIRCHWOOD DEER FARM in Pennsylvania. Artificial insemination of white-tailed deer on Oct. 19, 2000, Chemical immobilization of deer on Oct. 20, 2000 and Advanced Hoofstock Immobilization on Oct. 21, 2000. For more information contact [tjdoe@aol.com](mailto:tjdoe@aol.com) or [safecaptur@aol.com](mailto:safecaptur@aol.com) or phone (608) 767-3071.

## 7. PROJECTS WISH LIST

Here are three deer industry projects that I would like to begin. If you are interested in helping out by being part of a working group or committee, please let me know.

1. DEER INDUSTRY NEEDS ASSESSMENT - I have already done comprehensive surveys of deer farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan in helping the respective Associations to develop their business plans. I found that the results of this research better defined deer farmers and their needs, issues, frustrations and the obstacles they faced. Similar research needs to be done with deer farmers in other parts of Canada and in the United States so that we get a more complete picture of the industry.

2. DATA ELEMENTS – I am working on a project to identify, define and standardize the data elements to be collected on health care workers. The same work needs to be done in the deer industry. This project would identify what data must be collected and kept on each deer from birth until death (or disposal). There are many advantages of every farmer collecting the same, standardized set of data. When you sell the deer, the records go along with the deer and can be



used immediately without having to be changed. Standard data can be used for many research purposes designed to improve the quality of the genetics. Of course, we have no assurance that deer farmers would adopt these standards, but at least it would be a start.

3. EXPECTED PROGENY DIFFERENCES OR EPDs – Other livestock industries have developed progeny performance figures to assess and evaluate their breeders and the potential of untried progeny. Breeders can't make much progress without proper performance information, and commercial buyers only have sales hype and physical appearance to base their decisions. This project would be a long-term statistical study to identify, define and predict factors important in the improvement of genetics for the deer industry.

## 8. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

**W**e respect your right to privacy. If you wish to be removed from our mailing list at any time, simply send an e-mail to [editor@deerfarmer.com](mailto:editor@deerfarmer.com) with REMOVE in the Subject line.

If you want your name ADDED to our mailing list, please sign our Guest Book form that can be found at <http://www.deerfarmer.com/forms/guest.htm>

As per Privacy Policy, your name, e-mail address and any other information you provide us will only be used by Deerfarmer.com. This information will not be shared with any third party unless we get your permission first!

## 9. CONTACT INFORMATION

**W**e are always looking for articles and news about deer farming that we can print in this newsletter. To suggest or submit articles, contact the editor.

For more general information, comments and suggestions, please contact:

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