



Welcome to the APRIL 2001 edition of the *Deer Farmers' Digest*, a monthly electronic newsletter published by Deerfarmer.com - The Deer Farmers' Information Network. This *Digest* is distributed via e-mail to over 2,200 readers in 23 countries. A copy of ALL the issues of the *Digest* can be found at <http://digest.deerfarmer.com>

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1. THE DEER URINE MARKET

It's enough to make dollar signs dance in the deer farmer's eyes. Let's see, a single deer pees about half a gallon or 64 ounces a day. Sold as deer-hunting scents at \$4.00 to \$13 per ounce (retail), that amounts to \$256 to \$832 a day or \$93,440 to \$303,680 per deer per year! Not a bad return on your investment! Too good to be true? Probably. A great opportunity for deer farmers? Maybe.

At *Deerfarmer.com*, we get frequent inquiries about how to get into the deer urine market. In this article, we will examine this potential market – its opportunities, risks and production considerations. Hopefully, this will help you decide whether deer urine is a market you want to get into.

It all began with Mr. Richard, a Cobleskill, New York trapper who produced the first known deer scent in the 1940s. It was called Original Indian Buck Lure and he sold it through ads in outdoor magazines for \$2 a bottle. It did not contain any deer urine.

Urine-based scents really got started in the 1960 when George Robbins, a Connellsville, Pennsylvania mink farmer founded the Robbins Scent Co. He began supplying urine in bulk and bottle to scent sellers who sold “secret” formulas and blends.

The market today for deer-hunting scents, most of them urine-based, is estimated to be about \$18 million per year in the United States. Some 17 million Americans hunt white-tailed deer each fall, and are looking for every advantage they can get.

There are several reasons why deer scents are growing in popularity. Hunters typically do not have as much time as in the past to devote to shooting that trophy white-tail buck. Any “gimmick” that promises greater success – especially if it only costs \$4 to \$10 – is worth a try.

If you have ever hunted white-tailed bucks (I have), you know what an intelligent and cunning animal they are. Older, quality trophy bucks are very hard to bag. If they are hunted a lot, they develop very effective strategies to ensure they live past the hunting season. So deer scents are designed to appeal to their weaknesses for females, especially during the rutting season. Many hunters (including myself) have seen doe-in-heat scents attract bucks.

Another reason for the growing use of deer scents is the boom in bow hunting. Bow hunters need to get close to their prey for good shots, and luring big bucks with the scent of a sexy doe is one way to do it.

Is there any empirical evidence that these scents are effective in attracting big bucks? Urine and glandular secretions help wild animals, including deer, find each other to mate, fight or, in the case of natural enemies, stay away. Whether they are effective coming out of a bottle is debatable. However, this is a mute point – enough people believe in the value of the product to keep on buying it. So the market keeps on growing.

Production

If you want to produce deer urine to sell, how do you do it? Paul Carson of Kane, Pennsylvania has been in the business for 15 years. He produces and sells urine under the name of West Wind Whitetails & Scents.

According to Carson, the first important factor is to have tame deer. He bottle-raises all his fawns that will later provide the urine. This includes bucks. Tame bucks can be very dangerous during the rut, so remove their hard antlers for your own safety.

Mr. Caron’s collection system is simple. He has raised buildings about 8 feet square. These buildings have slatted floors that allow the urine to fall through to the sub-floor which drains the urine into a pipe and then into a bucket. The urine is collected every morning and refrigerated.

He puts 2 does in overnight for a period of about 12 hours. They have all the water and feed they need. Two does can produce about a gallon and a half of pee in this time period. Since the deer regularly eat in the buildings, there is no stress to them. The floors are pressure washed regularly to keep them clean.

Mr. Carson found that by boarding up the buildings to make them darker causes the does to come into heat. This is one way that doe-in-heat urine can be collected earlier and be on the market for hunting season.

The collected urine is strained. Carson says paint filters from the local body shop are excellent. The urine is immediately refrigerated. He adds a preservative – sodium benzoate (same stuff as found in

soft drinks). Much of the urine is stored in 5 gallon buckets and shipped to scent companies all over the USA by UPS. (Paul admits he gets some pretty funny looks when he declares to the UPS clerks what the contents are). Doe-in-heat urine currently sells from \$70 to \$100 per gallon.

Mr. Carson packages the rest of the urine into 2 or 4 oz high density plastic bottles to be sold under his West Wind brand name. These are sold to local sporting goods stores, over his website and via the phone. For a small operation, bottling can be easily done manually.

Marketing

We strongly recommend that you secure your markets FIRST before you invest in any production capability.

The easiest route is to provide urine to established scent companies who have the marketing channels in place. Ideally, you can secure contracts to provide the urine in advance. Be sure you understand and can live with the terms of any agreements.

The other way to go is to market the products under your own brand name. There are many more factors to consider here. First, you will need to establish a strong brand name. Your packaging must be appealing, and labeling is important. According to Carson, your labels should be 4-color and also include scan codes.

You will also have evaluate and develop your distribution channels. Your choices are direct marketing or use of retailers. Sporting goods stores are the best choice for retailers. You will have to do a lot of visits to the stores, phone calls and give out many free samples. Your success with the retailers will depend on how well your products sell. You may also want to consider some cooperative marketing programs with your retailers to move your products off their shelves.

Direct marketing can be done through selling off your website, direct mail campaigns, ads in outdoor magazines, brochures, trade shows and so on. There is much more administration involved – taking orders, collecting payments, shipping the products out and related activities. You need to be properly set-up and staffed for direct marketing. Otherwise, poor service will kill your business very quickly.

What about your product line? Doe-in-heat seems to be the best seller. There is also regular doe pee, and dominant buck urine (buck-in-rut). The latter also seems to be growing in popularity. You may come up with some other products that fit well into your product line.

What about unique features? Some claim there scents are 100% natural. Others guarantee freshness. Some claim that their products are not watered-down. Some claim that their pee comes from genetically superior whitetails. Some say their urine comes from individual animals and is never mixed. How will you differentiate your deer scent products from the crowd?

Risks

As with any business venture, the deer urine market has its risks. Here are some you should be aware of:

1. *Competition* – there are some big players with heavy advertising budgets in this market, e.g., Buck Stop Lure Co.'s Mate-Triks Original Doe-in-Heat Buck Scent, Wellington Outdoors' Tink's

69 Doe-in-Rut Buck Lure, and Pete Rickard's Love Potion No. Nine. In addition, there are probably many others smaller players in the market as well. (Paul Carson says business has never been better, so there still may be room for additional suppliers and products).

2. *Opponents* – PETA has been successful in getting deer urine products removed from some store shelves because of claims of animal cruelty. Don't even think of caging up your deer for long periods of time to collect urine. Practicing humane animal treatment and welfare will reduce this risk.

3. *Scams* – unfortunately, the industry has had a few scandals in the past where products were not what they were advertised to be – plain ammonia, cow urine, etc. being bottled and sold as deer scents. Deal with reputable companies, or if you are selling the product yourself, always be ethical and maintain your integrity.

4. *Diseases* – at least one hunter claims he got brucellosis from using deer urine. It is probably a good idea to collect urine only from TB and brucellosis tested and accredited herds. Now with the CWD issue, the animals should come from herds under CWD surveillance. Perhaps the industry needs to look at how to pasteurize the urine without reducing its effectiveness.

How to use the product

There are several ways deer scents can be used. One is to pour some on your clothing to mask your own scent and to attract the bucks. This is NOT recommended because deer can be dangerous animals when in rut and can attack (nearly happened to me)!. Also as indicated above, deer urine is hardly a sanitary substance, and there is a risk of contacting brucellosis or some other disease. Besides, when you walk into the house, your wife is sure to throw you out!

Here are three recommended ways:

1. *Drag line method* – approximately 100 to 150 yards before you get to your hunting area, take a clean piece of cloth, saturate in scent, attach a string and drag the string behind you until you pass your hunting spot. Hang the cloth about 1 foot off the ground and then walk back to your hunting spot.

2. *Cotton ball method* – place 5 cotton balls in an empty film canister overnight with the scent. Locate these cotton balls around your hunting spot and about 1 foot off the ground so that the scent can circulate.

3. *Sprinkle method* – open the bottle of scent and sprinkle a few drops in several areas around your hunting spot. Be sure to sprinkle scent on a few low ground branches so that the scent can circulate.

Deer urine is a totally renewable, sustainable resource that may offer some revenue diversification for white-tailed (and mule) deer farmers. It is definitely worth checking out.

[My thanks and appreciation to Paul Carson for sharing all his secrets on urine production and marketing with us at the Alberta White-tail and Mule Deer Convention in Edmonton in April 2001. Paul can be reached at deer@penn.com or visit his website at <http://users.penn.com/~deer>].

2. RECORDS, RECORDS AND MORE RECORDS

[This article is based in part on a presentation made at the Alberta White-tail and Mule Deer Convention in Edmonton, Canada by Scott McAllister, the developer of *The Rancher*, a livestock records management program.]

I know you would rather be out in the pens looking after your deer and elk rather than sitting at a computer updating your livestock records. However, you better get used to spending more time keeping detailed records!

There are five major reasons why good livestock records must be maintained:

1. *Regulations* – most jurisdictions that license game farms also require detailed records be kept. These records must be submitted to the regulatory agency (e.g., inventory) and may be subject to inspection and audit. Penalties are often in place for non-compliance.
2. *Herd management* – this includes keeping track of animal inventory, health records, and performance data.
3. *International/domestic health management* – with concerns about CWD and FMD, health records are now mandatory in order to export animals and cervid products.
4. *Marketing* – people are interested in pedigree data on breeding stock and semen.
5. *Consumers* – health conscious consumers want to know where their products came from - “from pasture to plate”.

Data is simply numbers e.g., birth weights, dates, breeding and exposure, antler measurements, sires and dams and treatment dates. In itself, data is not very useful.

Information is structured and analyzed data, e.g., weight gains, antler scores, cost analyses, health summaries, progeny summaries and so on. It is information that can be used to improve your herd and the profitability of your operations. For example, good information can help you cull your herd of poor producers, e.g., open does, single births, below average weights. Good information can be used to select breeding stock, e.g., above average characteristics, strong weight gains, superior antler scores.

What type of data should you be keeping? Here are some suggestions.

Animal Data

Basic data that you collect and keep on each deer or elk should include:

1. Animal name
2. Tag number id
3. Herd number id
4. Microchip or tattoo id
5. Other id
6. DNA profile
7. Species

8. Purity
9. Date of birth
10. Gender
11. Sire
12. Dam
13. Source farm id - if purchased
14. Disposal date
15. Disposal reasons (sold, slaughtered, died).

Due to the paranoia about CWD and other diseases, any animal that dies without obvious causes on your farm should be sent in for a post mortem. This is required if you are part of a CWD Surveillance program anyway. Record the reason(s) for death and keep a copy of the lab report on file.

Performance Data

Unlike other livestock industries, we really don't have standard performance characteristics that we measure in deer and elk. Most producers are interested in antler scores in deer and velvet production in elk. Therefore, the typical performance data that most collect includes:

1. Birth weight
2. Weight at specified ages
3. Antler score at specified ages
4. Velvet production at specified ages

Medication and Health Data

With increasing public pressure on livestock practices, society is demanding that farmers show they are responsible food producers. Producers can use medication records to evaluate and improve production while showing good management for food quality and safety.

Good medication records are essential to:

1. Identify problem areas – you can't manage what you can't measure.
2. Determine the costs of diseases and assess whether it is cheaper to prevent or treat or dispose of the animal.
3. Help you and your vet to determine optimal dosages, treatment intervals and duration of treatment. (Especially important with cervids since we don't have much research data and most drugs are "off-label".
4. Show prudent use of antimicrobials. The livestock industry is being pressured to reduce the use of antibiotics to avoid the increase in superbugs.

Medication records are also necessary to receive certification in on-farm food safety programs and various branded programs. This information should also include:

1. Vaccination records
2. Treatment records
3. Feed medication formulations
4. Drug inventory
5. Pesticide-herbicide use on crops and pastures
6. Veterinary prescriptions and use of products such as altering the dose, frequency, route, location, species, disease and withdrawal period.

Everyone who owns livestock and uses drugs should keep records on the use of vaccines, antibiotics, parasecticides and pesticide-herbicides. Information should also be tracked as to the method of administration, e.g., orally in the feed or water, injected or by implant, ear tag or oiler.

Any producer concerned about liability should keep written records on animal health products and pesticide-herbicide. If a trace-back occurs because of a chemical residual problem, these records will help identify the source and responsibility for the problem.

Medication records can be as simple as writing which animal was treated with what drug on the calendar or in a note book. A better choice is computerized records as mentioned below. Medication records should be kept for the life of the animal or for at least two years after the animal is sold into the food chain.

How should your records be kept? Although you can probably do an adequate job keeping paper records, a computerized record keeping system is the way to go. You have several options here. You can use standard software such as spreadsheets, word processors or databases. Unfortunately, standard office software does not have the capability to perform complex and useful analyses of the data.

A better solution is to use one of the specialized livestock software packages such as *The Rancher* (http://www.westpointenet.com/_scripts/index.asp?mnews=1) or *Game Master* (<http://www.keltec.com/software/index.html>). The advantages of these packages is that they provide: a) a data model, b) accessibility, c) data organization, d) time savings, and e) detailed and complex analyses.

Another advantage of using these software packages is that they are capable of electronic data exchange – sending selected data elements to the regulatory body or transferring the records to a purchaser of your animals. (Alberta Agriculture's new cervid inventory system will have the option for deer/elk producers to update their government records electronically over the Internet). If you are using computerize records, remember to back-up, back-up and back-up your data files! You can't afford to lose them!

If you don't have a proper records management system in place yet for your deer or elk farm, don't procrastinate much longer. Sooner or later you will need to have such a system in place – so you better do it soon!

3. MORE ON VENISON MARKETING

[This article based on a presentation made at the Alberta White-tail and Mule Deer Convention in Edmonton, Canada by Nancy Kindler, a consultant with Full Course Strategies Inc.]

As the numbers of farmed deer and elk continue to increase dramatically, new markets have to be found for animals not destined for breeding, velvet production or trophy hunting preserves. One potential market is the venison market, especially for upscale, fine-dining restaurants.

According to Nancy Kindler, the best opportunities for venison are in the local markets. Up-scale restaurants account for 6% of the total market. These clients usually don't quibble on price. The typical mark-up is 300%. Purchasing decisions are made by chefs – and each one is unique.

Here are some of the factors that are important to chefs:

1. Consistency of product – size and quality. If customers like a particular dish, they expect it to be the same the next time they order it.
2. Plate coverage – the greater the better.
3. Cooking times – the shorter the better.
4. Portion control and packaging – reduces waste, handling and labour.
5. Consumer trends – providing what customers are looking for.
6. Taste and nutritional value – a concern to more customers.
7. Marketing support – can you help the restaurants increase their sales.
8. Customization and exclusivity – can you provide the restaurant with something that makes them different from the competition?
9. Distribution method – most chefs don't want to deal with multiple suppliers.
10. Ease of ordering and order fill rates.
11. Product guarantees – do you stand behind your venison?
12. Training in preparation – can you show them make great dishes?
13. Free samples – some 99% will want free samples to try.

A survey conducted by Alberta Agriculture of restaurants found that:

1. Most restaurants said they would be interested in purchasing and serving venison.

2. The majority of restaurants expect the demand for venison to remain the same or increase.
3. Demand for venison increases in the fall, decreases in the spring and remains steady in the summer.
4. Once customers try venison, they usually have it again. The challenge is to get them to try it for the first time.

This market is an ideal place to start while numbers of meat deer and elk are still limited. However, to be successful, the same rules apply as with any venture – provide a quality product along with exceptional service.

4. TWO NEW MARKETING COOPERATIVES

Deer and elk farming cannot become mature and sustainable industries based solely farm-gate sales. Large buyers and distributors simply do not want to deal with thousands of producers individually. Therefore it is good news that hear that at least two “New Generation Cooperatives” (see November 2000 *Digest*) are being established to market deer and elk products on behalf of the producers.

One is American Prairie Processors (APP) (wadehanda@aol.com, phone: 816-858-3019, Fax: 816-431-5092 or mail Box 105, Platte City, MO 64079). According to their fact sheet, here are some answers about APP that producers may have.

1. Why do I need APP?

All producers, large and small, need a place to market their production each and every year and be paid. APP is needed to support the growth and development of the elk industry. Given the increasingly competitive climate that the elk industry operates in, APP aims to help producers maximize their collective resources and keep them from being put at a competitive disadvantage.

2. How do I know that APP is not a “fly-by-night” operation?

APP will be legally set up as a U7 Corporation in the States of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota and Nebraska. APP will be registered with the Securities Exchange Commission and licensed to do business in those states.

3. Am I obligated to sell velvet and meat to APP annually?

As a shareholder of APP, we will purchase meat and velvet from you first. As a producer, your relationship with APP is one a first-right-of-refusal basis. If you can sell your velvet and meat animals for more than what APP is offering, you have the right to do so. The benefit of APP is that you have a place to market your production annually. You will also benefit on the back side through dividends as a shareholder. APP will make decisions based on market conditions to be profitable for its shareholders.

4. Where will the drop-off spots be for meat and velvet?

Velvet will have one major pickup point and that will be in Windom Minnesota. APP will also arrange pickup points throughout the six state area in July of each year. Meat animals will be slaughtered at the closest plant available to the producer. APP will arrange slaughter dates to process as many animals as possible at one time to reduce costs of slaughter, inspection and fabricating. APP's emphasis is marketplace efficiency.

Producer/shareholders need to improve the quality of velvet and their bottom line by velvetting two-year olds and culling based on velvet weights. For example, 7 lbs or better and they go out to pasture; less than that they go to the meat processor as soon as possible. That way, you do not have to incur more costs than you need to, nor handle the animals more than you have to.

5. Will you only buy from APP shareholders?

APP will buy only from shareholders to fill all orders. Our intention is to fill as many orders as economically viable. We will fill orders from any source only to improve the viability of APP for the shareholders.

6. Why is APP only in these six states?

These six states are the heartland of the American elk industry. APP has to concentrate in as small a geographic area as possible for economic reasons. APP must abide by the laws outlined in the Securities Exchange Commission and as such there are limitations, restrictions and costs associated with doing business in all 50 states.

7. How can we be guaranteed that you will purchase our velvet and meat at a fair market value?

APP has to pay the shareholder/producer the same as the next company, or you will sell your production to them. The price of the product is determined by market forces. APP is part of the market and therefore has to compete; however, we will not pay more than the marketplace. APP has to be successful and has to make money for its shareholders.

8. When do we get paid?

Velvet will be paid for at the time of pick up. Meat animals will have two methods of payment: a) hot carcass – net 30 days; and
b) live weight – on the hoof price will be paid when they cross the scale.

9. Will there be an evaluation of our antler and meat animals for improvement purposes for the next year's harvest?

APP will provide you a written evaluation and suggestions on how to improve your product. This will make the producer more money, and give APP a better product to sell.

10. Does my herd have to have a certain health status?

For the betterment of the industry, and for the quality of our products in the marketplace, all antler and meat animals should come from accredited, monitored herds.

11. How many shares do I have to buy?

A shareholder has to buy one share for \$1,500 at sign-up. A second share by October 2003 to be paid for in product, i.e., \$1,500 in antler or meat. APP wants shareholders to have one share invested in antler and one in meat for supply assurance. This is NOT a yearly investment. A shareholder can purchase as many shares as they want, but a minimum of two is required.

In Alberta (Canada), a similar agency is being set up – the Alberta Wapiti Products Coop (AWPC). The organizers have completed a feasibility study and a business plan. The Coop is in the process of being set up and shares are being sold to producers in the province. For more information on AWPC, contact Gerald Sam at srgp@telusplanet.net or at 1-780-539-4880.

These organizations are certainly a step in the right direction. They deserve your support! Find out more about them, and consider signing up.

5. EVENTS CALENDAR

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

WISCONSIN DEER AND ELK FARMERS CONVENTION will be held on April 20-21, 2001. Call 888-233-1667 for details or e-mail to info@wcdefa.org or visit <http://www.wcdefa.org>

NORTHEAST DEER AND ELK FARMERS CONVENTION will be held in Vermont on the weekend of April 20-22 at the Ramada Inn in White River Jct. For more information contact Missy Blackwell at blackwel@zwi.net or Hank Dimuzio at 802-388-8979.

EAST CENTRAL BRANCH OF NADEFA spring meeting will be held in Morgantown, West Virginia, USA on April 28, 2001. For more information contact Thelma Morgan at 814-694-2298 (tjdoe@aol.com) or Tammi Grandia at 304-768-0344.

Many more events, including deer/elk sales, tradeshow and workshops are listed in the Calendar section of Deerfarmer.com that can be found at <http://events.deerfarmer.com>. Take advantage of this free service to list your upcoming events.

6. DEERFARMER.COM NEWS

Here are some of the recent developments at Deerfarmer.com:

1. Global Deer & Elk Farm Directory is growing - the site is located at <http://www.globaldeer.com>. It also can be reached using <http://www.dfuid.com> and <http://www.elkdirectory.com>.

We are transferring the listings in our old Farm Directory to Global Deer & Elk Farm Directory now. However, we encourage you to go ahead and add your listing here immediately. But first check to see if you are already listed (by using the Search function). If your farm is in the Directory, call or e-mail the webmaster – webmaster@deerfamer.com to get your password that will allow you to edit and update your listing.

7. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

We 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 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>

The *Digest* is available in a printed format. A \$3 per issue (\$36 per year) fee applies to cover postage, paper and handling costs.

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!

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

We are always looking for articles and news about deer and elk farming that we can print in this newsletter. E-mail, fax or mail your ideas and articles to the Editor as per below.

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