

Welcome to the APRIL 2002 edition of the *Deer Farmers' Digest*, a monthly electronic newsletter published for those interested in raising deer, elk and reindeer. This *Digest* (ISSN 1499-1357) is distributed via e-mail to over 2,800 readers in 28 countries.

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1. MARKETING THE ELK INDUSTRY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

[Based on a presentation made by Russell Sawchuk at the North American Elk Breeders Association 2002 Convention in Las Vegas USA]

When the going gets tough, the tough get marketing! Now is not the time to back off on our marketing. Rather, as an industry and as individual producers we need to accelerate our efforts to develop new and expanded consumer demand for our elk products and services.

How we got into this mess

In its thirty-year history, elk farming has never been so down as in the past year. How did this situation come about?

A major driver behind the rise and success of the elk farming industry has been the demand in Asia for quality elk velvet antler (EVA) produced in North America. When the Asian economies were booming, EVA demand was very strong, and profitability was exceptional. This caused many people to enter the industry without the usual preparation, research or business plan.

The elk industry and its producers had little incentive to do any marketing or develop new products/markets during this period of prosperity. After all, the buyers would literally come to your door and take all the velvet you could produce at a very good price. Aw, those were the good times!

However, this one product (velvet), and one market (Korea), would come back to haunt us.

In 1996, the “Asian flu” caused all major Asian economies to slip into recession, where they remain. Consumer spending in those countries drastically slowed. Most antler buyers could not get a letter of credit nor take any cash out of their home countries to buy North American velvet.

The second major problem developed in early 2000 with the discovery of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in farmed elk in Saskatchewan (Canada). By early 2001, Korea had banned the import of all cervid products from North America. This ban is still in place. Since Korea purchased about 70% of EVA, this effectively dried up the demand and markets for this velvet.

The CWD issue has also raised concerns in the minds of consumers as to the safety of elk antler and venison products (even though there is no evidence that CWD poses any danger to people or other species).

The CWD issue was jumped on by the opponents of game farming who argued that elk farming threatens wildlife cervid populations. Many states and provinces have used CWD as an excuse to place import bans on cervids, thus significantly reducing markets for breeding animals.

Montana voters closed down game farming in that state. Opponents to the industry in many other states and provinces are trying to get legislation through that will ban, restrict or regulate the industry out of existence.

In 2001, the North American economies also experienced a slow-down. These were further exacerbated by the events of September 11, 2001. Consumers were buying less. People were also watching their money more closely, so less capital from investors and banks was available to the elk farming industry.

A final issue is the strength of the US dollar. Due to currency exchange rates, velvet that is produced in New Zealand, Australia and Canada is significantly cheaper than EVA produced by American elk farmers.

All of these factors are collectively responsible for the depressed state of the elk farming industry in North America as it exists today.

Strategies for increasing markets

There are 4 major ways elk farmers can increase their sales:

1. *Sell more to your existing customer base.* This could be more of the same products, or value-added products and services. However, since we only have one major customer (Korea), who currently can't even buy our product, this approach is not going to get us very far.
2. *Take away customers from competitors.* Remember that your competitors are trying to do the same. To get customers to switch, you have to offer something of greater perceived value than they are getting from their current supplier. Raiding customers is a common strategy during difficult times. Unfortunately this approach is often counter-productive for the entire industry. Farmers trying to increase their sales of velvet or venison products often do on the basis of price. This drives prices (and profits) down, reduces quality and service and leaves a bad impression of the industry.
3. *Expand your customer base.* This could be new customers in your area, or customers nationally or internationally. This is a preferred approach and is being done to some extent. North American produced velvet is now being sold by major supermarkets, health food stores and pet supply outlets. Much more needs to be done on the consumer awareness and education levels to increase demand for these now available products.
4. *Add new products and services.* These can be sold to your existing customers and to new customers. I believe this offers the greatest potential for the industry. Some ways this can be done will be discussed later.

What we market

The elk farming industry markets many products and services. These include

- Breeding animals, e.g., bulls, cows, calves
- Elk velvet antler, e.g., raw or processed products
- Hard antler
- Semen and embryos
- Trophy bulls for hunting ranches
- Hunting preserves
- Venison and value-added meat products, e.g., jerky, smookies
- By-products, e.g., hides, leather, antlers, urine, etc.
- Eco/agri-tourism e.g., bed and breakfast, photo safaris
- Consulting, training and other business/production services.

As a reference point regarding the relative importance of each product line, here are the sales percentages from New Zealand, where the deer farming industry is mature.

- Venison sales account for 76% of export revenues
- Velvet antler accounts for 12%
- Co-products account for 6%
- Miscellaneous 6%

The foundation of the New Zealand deer industry is meat. This makes it very similar to other livestock industries.

Strengths to build on

What is the long-term prognosis for the elk farming industry? I believe it is pretty good based on the following reasons:

1. *Native species.* The elk is native to North America and is well adapted to our environment. It is an extremely cost-effective animal to raise, and very efficient in its feed conversion.
2. *Multi-product.* Of all the alternative livestock species, elk provides the most possible revenue streams, e.g., velvet, meat, hunting, by-products, etc.
3. *Environmentally friendly.* Elk farming poses much less risk to the environment than other intensive livestock operations.
4. *Organically compatible.* Elk venison can easily meet the requirements to become “certified organic,” the most rapidly growing sector of the food market.
5. *Health benefits.* EVA has been used for 2000 years for a good reason – it works! Research is now showing that EVA does have many health benefits, with very few negative side-effects. Pet health markets have enormous potentials.

Market segment analysis

Let's discuss each of the major product groups and assess what can be done to expand these markets.

1. Breeding stock
 - a) Live animal movement is likely restricted for the next few years. It looks like most states/provinces are instituting 3 to 5 year CWD monitoring requirements on elk before they can be imported. This will certainly decrease markets for breeding stock.
 - b) As a result, there will be an increase in interest in A.I. and embryos as a way to enhance herd genetics. If you are looking at the breeding stock market, this may be the only way to sell genetics outside your jurisdiction.

- c) Low prices provide an opportunity to upgrade genetics, get new farmers started and attract investors. There are always a few individuals that will see this period as a great opportunity to make some smart investments. Seek them out.
- d) Now is a good time to initiate selective breeding programs for different product lines, e.g., antler vs. venison. Rather than just breeding for large antlers, farmers may want to consider breeding for the venison market – large, tasty animals. Those extra pounds in a meat market will mean greater profits.

2. Elk velvet antler

- a) Pent-up demand is coming. My prediction is that Korean farmers will not be able to keep up with the demand for velvet in their own country. When the import ban is lifted, the buyers will be back. My hope is that by then we will have diversified our markets sufficiently to prevent a repeat of previous economic cycles in the industry.
- b) Velvet needs better market positioning in North America, e.g., different products for arthritis, for athletic performance, for sexual well-health, etc. Because EVA has so many potential health benefits, it creates a credibility gap with the general consumer. Some companies are now starting to offer different products.
- c) We must explore and develop new markets, e.g., pets, livestock. Research and field trials have shown that EVA works well in relieving arthritic symptoms in dogs. There are over 60 million dogs in Canada and the USA – a huge potential market. I am aware of an unpublished study where mice fed with EVA doubled the litter size of the control group. Maybe we don't need more mice in this world, but using EVA to increase fertility rates in hogs could be a whole new, profitable application. Also, I have had a request from a researcher to test EVA in increasing dairy milk production.
- d) Quality assurance and standards are in place. Reputable companies sell velvet antler products that are tested, safe and that follow strict QA procedures. This needs to continue. We don't need home produced velvet products entering the marketplace.
- e) Consumers have to be told (again and again) about the procedures we have in place to ensure the quality and safety of the EVA products we sell to them.
- f) A plan and more research alliances are required to undertake research projects to scientifically demonstrate the health and nutraceutical benefits of velvet. A few years ago, I prepared an EVA research plan and compiled a list of Canadian and US researchers who were interested in doing work on velvet. I even have a number of research proposals ready to go. As an industry, we don't need to fund or do all this important research ourselves! We have friends! (I would be happy to share this information. Send me an e-mail to editor@deerfarmer.com).

3. Hunting preserves

- a) Hunting preserves face considerable opposition from animal rights activists, wildlife departments and wildlife associations. In many states and provinces, they are expressly forbidden by laws and/or regulations.
- b) Hunting preserves can provide attractive revenues from older bulls who are nearing the end of their productive lives. If they have a great set of antlers, then they will be in demand as shooters.
- c) Preserves meet consumers' demands for a quality hunting experience without the hassles associated with public hunting. More and more people who love to hunt are interested in private, affordable hunts. Despite all the opposition, there is a significant and growing market for paid hunting.
- d) Hunting operations must be run properly, otherwise they will negatively impact all operations. This is both from a "valued experience" perspective – the consumer had a great time and really valued the experience, and from the public's perspective, e.g., fair chase, humane treatment, etc. Unfortunately, I keep hearing of farmers who figure this is a quick way to make some significant money. They may provide a good trophy animal to hunt, but cut corners and service on the rest of the experience. This will ruin the whole industry in that jurisdiction as word gets out.
- e) Offer "catch and release" hunts. I had never heard of these until recently, when someone explained they offer tranquilizer hunts. The hunter shoots the trophy with a tranquilizer gun and gets his photo taken. The animal is reversed and goes on to participate in another hunt. The ultimate idea would be to have your prize bulls trained to lay down so people could take their photos. If your hunt clients want a trophy, perhaps you could include last year's antler sheds as part of the package. Elk farmers should seriously look at "catch and release" hunts. You can get a lot of money from the same animal, it appeals to those who like to hunt, but not to kill, and probably can be done in states/provinces that prohibit paid hunting.

4. Venison

- a) Elk is one of the most efficient producers of meat and, as such, is an ideal candidate to provide venison for the markets.
- b) Elk venison remains tender well into older animals according to a recent research done at the Lacombe (Alberta Canada) Agricultural Research Station. This gives the elk farmer greater flexibility in disposing of their animals.
- c) Venison fits well into the explosive demand for natural, organic food products. The organic food market is growing at 20% per year. As described in last month's edition of the *Digest*, elk venison can easily meet the requirements for organic certification.

- d) Price competitive with other meats. One of the advantages of low animal prices is that elk venison is now much more affordable. It is a great time to introduce chefs, restaurants, delis, gourmets and the public to fine North American ranch-raised venison.
- e) The challenge for the industry is to ensure consistent quality and taste. This may require grading standards to be developed, and producers may need to explore finishing feed-lots much like the cattle industry.
- f) We need several large organizations (private or co-ops) that can do the branding, provide the supply, and maintain the quality to service the retail and institutional sectors. Help start one up in your region and/or support existing ones.
- g) We need to develop new, convenient products for today's consumer. One of the downsides of venison is that it is difficult to cook properly. Given that nobody is interested in cooking today (40% of meals are eaten in fast-food restaurants), elk meat needs to be made convenient for the consumer. This means the development of a wide range of "boxed-food" products, e.g., prepared, frozen food that can be popped into the oven for 30 minutes and is ready to serve as a special treat. Another good idea is individually packaged, marinated elk steaks for the barbeque season.
- h) Farm-gate sales and farmers' markets are a place to start to expand the consumer's awareness for venison. This gives farmers an opportunity to learn consumers' wants and reactions, and gather market intelligence. Offer a variety of raw, pre-cooked and finished products to see what customers like.
- i) Use special events to give the public a taste of elk. We have had tremendous success in selling elk burgers and smokies at food festivals. Food festivals happen in every community. Become an integral part of them. Be sure to sell elk venison for off-site consumption, or at least have a list of where the public can buy elk venison locally.
- j) Explore the pet food markets. It seems a shame to sell such a fine meat as pet food. However, if it brings a fair price, and maybe gets rid of some of the trim, why not? One of the hottest trends in the pet food market is raw meat. Some "experts" are saying the reason dogs have so many illnesses and problems is that they are served processed food – something they were not designed to digest. Therefore, elk venison – raw, cooked or packaged – may offer some significant market opportunities.

5. Other elk products

- a) There is a consistent demand for sheds and hard antler for use in medicinal powders, handicrafts and taxidermy.
- b) A market exists for elk ivories, which are usually used for jewelry.
- c) Deer urine is a big market for deer producers; elk urine is not since very few North American hunters have the opportunity to hunt wild elk. However, there still may be a small niche market.

- d) I do have an occasional request for deer and elk milk. I'm not sure how you feel about milking a cow elk on a regular basis.
- e) Elk droppings may be another revenue source. It is probably a good project to keep the kids out of mischief over the summer.
- f) Bones can be sold at pet food stores or ground up and sold as fertilizer.
- g) Elk hides and leathers are always in demand by specialty shops. You need to prepare and store them properly.
- h) Elk brains for Phosphatidylserine (PS). PS is the only known supplement proven to prevent/treat age related memory loss in seniors. PS shows phenomenal results while products such as Ginkgo were shown to be ineffective. PS is derived from the fatty substance that surrounds all nerve cells.
- i) You can sell related products to other farmers – posts, fencing, feed, etc.

6. Related service revenues

- a) Eco- or agri-tourism such as farm vacations, bed and breakfast, farm tours, photo safaris, school trips, etc. can be a considerable part of your farm's revenues. A very significant benefit of this activity is that it makes many people aware of elk farming, and leave them with a positive image and support of our industry.
- b) Maybe your elk can take part in special events – movies, advertising, etc. I get occasional calls requesting animals to be part of movies or ads.
- c) You can make money by offering construction services to other farmers, e.g., fencing, handling facilities, etc.
- d) You can make money by providing consulting and design services to new or existing elk/deer farmers.
- e) Opportunities exist to offer processing and manufacturing services for velvet and venison. These usually require significant capital outlay, but may be an appropriate ancillary operations for some producers.
- f) Marketing and brokerage services are another service that is required in the elk industry. Not everyone likes to sell their products themselves; some prefer to use brokers. Skilled brokers will do well.

Industry issues

Here are some critical issues that must be addressed in order to enable effective marketing to take place.

1. *Live animal test for CWD.* I don't consider CWD to be a serious disease, but more a public relations nightmare. Until we get a live-animal test, opponents are going to continue trying to shut the industry down. It is hard to market when you are constantly fighting for your survival. So let's do whatever is necessary (fund-raising, lobbying, arm-twisting) to get researchers working on a reliable test.

2. *Position under agriculture.* Elk farming/ranching is a legitimate agricultural activity. As such, it should fall under the jurisdiction of the state agriculture department, and not under the Wildlife Management Department. The wildlife people have a different set of values and agenda, that are not always supportive of our industry. If you are still under wildlife, lobby to change over. Talk to Michigan (see Dan Marsh's article below) and Wisconsin, which are states that have successfully switched over.

3. *Resist over-regulation.* As an agricultural activity, elk ranching should have to follow the same rules and regulations as bison, cattle, sheep and ostriches. Remember that more regulations result in increased costs. As an industry, we have to be profitable to survive. The least we can demand is a level playing field with other livestock.

4. *Public relations campaign.* Mostly because of new cases of CWD being discovered in Colorado, Wisconsin and Alberta, the industry is getting hammered in the media. We need to do much more to get out our side of the story. We need a coordinated effort to get out positive news releases, letters to the editor, and complain about biased reporting. One idea is to hire well-connected freelance writers to prepare and distribute positive articles about the industry.

5. *Increased collaboration.* Because states/provinces regulate cervid farming industry, we have a plethora of associations representing elk farmers. Although these regional associations are essential to protect and advance the state of the industry in each jurisdiction, it makes national initiatives more difficult. And let's not kid ourselves – we are all in the same boat in North America. Do you really think that Iowa elk farmers can get \$50 a pound for velvet while Alberta farmers get only \$20? The same is true for venison and other products.

Provincial/state associations seem to have better access to government funding and grants. More coordination of projects and greater sharing of results is essential if the industry is to move ahead.

6. *More external funding.* The entire North American elk and deer farming industry must have fewer than 5,000 members. Even in good times, this is not enough to fund the major initiatives that need to be undertaken. During these difficult times, there is simply not enough cash within the industry to do the research and marketing that is critical. So we must look at bringing in more outside money. How can this be done?

Here are just a few thoughts. As indicated above, local associations should aggressively tap all government assistance that is available whether for research or product/market development. How about an Internet lottery to win a series of private preserve hunts in Canada and the USA? There are some 20 million Americans and Canadian residents that still hunt. A chance for a hunt of a lifetime for a \$20 ticket could raise a lot of money. How about getting 4-H clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides

groups all raising money for CWD research? We need to take a few pages out of PETA's book on fund-raising.

7. *Facilitate infrastructure development.* One of the best things we could do is to forge some serious alliances with big players to distribute and market our products. Having a major retail player sell our products (EVA, venison) would be a great first step. Individually we can't create these alliances. But you can support Qeva, Natraflex, AWAPCO and other similar companies that are working their butts off to develop the markets on your behalf. If these companies are successful, they will forge these alliances, and we will all benefit!

8. Let's have a plan. I have yet to see an overall comprehensive plan or vision for the elk industry in North America. Where is the business plan, marketing plan, research plan and human resource development plan that will enable us to reach our collective vision for elk ranching? If we don't know where we are going, how the hell can we all help the industry to get there?

So stop feeling sorry for yourself! Don't sit around waiting for the Koreans or NAEBA to rescue you! Take one or two or three or more of the suggestions/ideas above, get off your butts, and go sell some elk!

2. TEXAS SUSPENDS DEER AND ELK IMPORTS

To prevent the potential introduction of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) have issued separate orders that suspend the importation of live white-tailed and black-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk into Texas from any states until further notice.

Recently, CWD, a fatal brain-wasting disease, has been detected in eight states in either captive elk herds and/or free-ranging or farm-raised white-tailed deer, black-tailed deer and mule deer.

"The TAHC has been concerned about CWD for several years and, after working with representatives from the deer and elk industry, we implemented entry requirements and a voluntary herd monitoring program in 1999," explained Dr. Linda Logan, Texas' state veterinarian and executive director of the TAHC, the state's livestock health regulatory agency.

"In late 2001, the TAHC quarantined the movement of live white-tailed and black-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk from Colorado, when nearly 1,500 captive elk were depopulated because of infection or exposure to the disease," Dr. Logan said. "By February 2002, the commission followed with an identical movement quarantine on Nebraska, because CWD had been detected on a private hunting preserve and in nearby free-ranging white-tailed deer.

By mid-March CWD was detected in free-ranging white-tailed deer in Wisconsin. This was the first time the disease had been detected east of the Mississippi River. CWD also has been detected in several mule deer in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan."

Dr. Logan explained that the TPWD regulates the importation of white-tailed, black-tailed and mule deer under the provisions of the Scientific Breeder Permit regulations. The TAHC, sets standards for health requirements and also issues entry permits for elk and other deer considered to be exotic to Texas. From September 2001 through February 2002, the TAHC permitted 72 elk to enter the

state from Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, Montana, and Oklahoma. The TPWD reports that more than 2,100 deer were imported by scientific breeders since 1998, with most of them coming from Louisiana, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Illinois.

“Our concerns about the possible introduction of CWD into Texas by imported elk and deer rose further when Wisconsin animal health officials reported infection in their free-ranging white-tailed deer. At the same time, we also were receiving inquiries from deer and elk producers in states that had no CWD surveillance programs. After consulting with industry, our agencies agreed that we should exercise extreme caution now and stop the importation of these susceptible species of deer and elk from all states, rather than regret it later,” said Dr. Logan.

“As of March 20, the TAHC quarantined all states, prohibiting the entry of elk, mule deer, and white-tailed and black-tailed deer to give us adequate time to readdress our entry and surveillance regulations. Before admitting additional animals into the state, we must ensure that our regulations are reasonable, yet effective, to protect our multi-billion dollar domestic wildlife and exotic hoof stock against CWD.”

“At this time, there is no evidence that CWD is transmissible to other hoof stock, such as antelope, axis or fallow deer, which will still be allowed to enter Texas, if they meet our requirements for tuberculosis and brucellosis testing and veterinary examination,” said Dr. Logan.

CWD was first seen in captive mule deer in 1967 at the Colorado Division of Wildlife’s research facilities in Fort Collins. Since then, it has been detected in free-ranging deer in Colorado, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Wyoming and South Dakota. The disease has also been found in captive elk or deer facilities in Oklahoma, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska and South Dakota. Both free-ranging deer and captive elk herds in Saskatchewan, Canada, also have been affected.

CWD, triggered by abnormal prions in the brain, is confirmed through microscopic examination of brain tissue. Dr. Logan said that infected animals may incubate the disease for three years or longer before they exhibit clinical signs that include drooling, excessive thirst, dramatic loss of weight and body condition, poor hair coat, staggering, and finally death.

Dr. Logan said researchers do not completely understand how the disease is spread, but suspect that the infectious agent may be shed in urine, saliva or fluids associated with calving. Because there is no live animal test, and because CWD is a chronic disease that develops slowly over months or years, herds must be monitored for at least five years before they are considered “free” from CWD. Herd monitoring involves collecting and examining brain tissue from every deer or elk in the herd that dies, either from slaughter, natural death, or hunter harvest to determine if the animal had the disease.

The TAHC offers a voluntary CWD monitoring program in Texas that encompasses all deer and elk, including fallow and white-tailed deer. However, only about 20 herds in Texas are enrolled, Dr. Logan pointed out. She said TAHC staff would like to see increased surveillance on Texas white-tailed deer raised under permit by scientific breeders.

“Ideally, deer or elk herds in Texas should be part of a comprehensive monitoring program, so that we can protect our valuable wildlife resource in Texas,” she said. “With a multi-billion dollar hunting and ranching industry, I believe that CWD monitoring is extremely important.”

A number of states are taking action to protect their elk and domestic and exotic deer herds from CWD. Connecticut prohibits the entry of any elk or deer, while North Carolina animal health officials prohibit the entry of deer or elk from counties (and contiguous counties) where CWD has been diagnosed. Missouri prohibits the entry of deer and elk that have been in any CWD endemic area within the previous five years.

In Colorado, animal health officials require mandatory surveillance of all elk mortalities, whether they are natural deaths, slaughter, or hunt park kills. Likewise, in 2000, Utah initiated mandatory testing for CWD, at the request of the Utah Elk Breeders Association, that prohibits the importation of any elk from herds known to be exposed to or positive for CWD. No cases of CWD have been detected in Utah.

Other states, like Minnesota, are testing deer within the state, developing plans for expanded monitoring for the disease and organizing contingency plans for handling CWD. In Nebraska, where infected wild deer were detected, Game and Parks Commission officials are preparing to reduce the wild deer population in the affected area. Last year, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officials expanded CWD testing to include locker checks of some meat processors that handled wild game. To date, all samples tested from Washington deer and elk have been negative for CWD.

Indiana officials issue entry permits for deer and elk on a case-by-case basis, after reviewing a full medical history on the herd and evaluating the herd's CWD monitoring program. Indiana animal health officials have also fashioned entry requirements based on each state's level of risk for having CWD in free-ranging or captive herds.

“A variety of approaches are being tried to prevent the introduction of CWD into states, but inevitably the disease is appearing in elk herds around the country and on several occasions, in the free-ranging deer within close proximity to confined herds. Texas must take a more active role in assuring the health of our deer and elk,” said Dr. Logan.

“Without a live animal test, we have no way to screen animals before they come into our state. We need to establish hunter-kill surveillance and step up the participation in herd monitoring programs. This would allow us to detect CWD in Texas early and stop its potential spread,” said Dr. Logan. “Implementations for a widespread Texas effort would necessitate the support and participation by the hunting, and deer and elk ranching industries.”

For more information, contact Carla Everett, information officer, Texas Animal Health Commission, at 1-800-550-8242, ext. 710, or ceverett@tahc.state.tx.us

3. AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO DISEASE MANAGEMENT

[By Len Jubenville, Delclayna Whitetail & Bison Co. Ltd., info@deerstore.com]

Please accept this as your personal invitation and plea to support an initiative in convincing CFIA, USDA and our governments that murdering healthy animals is an unacceptable method of disease control. This has been going on long enough! Let's all learn from our mistakes and make sure these inhumane acts cease now only to be written alongside the Holocaust in our history books because after all, it is a holocaust.

Wasting healthy animals should never have been an accepted method of controlling disease around the world. Why should healthy animals be destroyed because of our human inadequacies and ignorance? For far too long authorities have been hiding behind health and trade issues to justify these mass slaughters. They are always quick to point out that if we do not take these drastic measures, other countries will not trade with us.

Our answer to this comment should be that if any country continues to use such an archaic, antiquated and inhumane policy, we would terminate our trading relationships until they change their ways. Someone needs to make a stand for healthy animals now.

Personally, I'm ready to do whatever it takes to bring this initiative to a fruitful solution. I hope that one day soon my fellow humans will agree that these old policies should be quickly abolished around the world. Let s grab the buck by the antlers and the bull by the horns and do something about this now.

In my opinion, a more humane and less costly method would be to implement a health-environmental program that involves quarantining, surveillance, and recorded movement of all animals. The following is a brief example of the solution I believe would work.

1. We declare a disease to be reportable throughout North America. As required, all farmers and hunters would send specific animal parts in for testing.
2. All road kills should be picked up by Fish & Wildlife and also sent in for testing.
3. No animals of any kind shall be transported without a record of movement permit. This would only apply to animals that are being relocated permanently or for periods longer than seven days.
4. Once an animal has been confirmed as having a reportable disease, the remainder of the herd would be quarantined and put on a special surveillance program that would require routine visual inspection with a minimum of 5% of the total herd slaughtered annually. Example: for CWD, this may have to be for a period of 40 months.
5. Animals from a quarantined herd can only be relocated to an abattoir, a harvesting preserve or a new producer under special permit.
6. In the case of an abattoir, the meat will be kept separate at that location until all testing has been completed and the carcass declared disease free and acceptable for human consumption (maximum 4 days)

7. In the case of a hunting preserve, the meat will remain on the premises until all testing has been completed.

8. All by-products, except hard antlers, will not be transportable until all required tests on that animal have been completed.

9. No animal from a confirmed herd can ever leave an abattoir or a hunting preserve alive.

10. No animals can be imported into a quarantined herd. No animals from a quarantined herd will be allowed to relocate as breeding stock unless it's to start a new producer with a premise not adjoining an existing herd. Example: a distance of ½ or 1 mile, with the new herd being quarantined for the same term and conditions as the herd of origin.

11. Compensation will be paid for all animals that would not generate the minimum income for the producer. Once proven that loss of income is directly related to a reportable disease, all farmers within that industry would qualify for compensation. An example would be like grain farmers receiving assistance during a period of drought. No one in this day and age should ever have to suffer financially as elk and deer farmers are presently made to experience.

We denounce our scorched earth policy and reassure everyone concerned that we have the science and technology to guarantee that only healthy products will leave our abattoirs for human consumption.

We continue and accelerate our research to develop more efficient tests and testing methods that would always take into consideration the welfare of humans and animals. The millions of dollars that we would save by not destroying our healthy animals should provide ample funding for research.

For years we have been led to believe that science, technology and governments can eradicate disease. Disease is akin to terrorism; you will never eradicate it. You have to learn to control it. This would be best achieved with a policy and method accepted and enforced throughout North America.

As Dr. David Suzuki mentioned in his book "Time to Change," our human created-boundaries have become so real that we think that air, water, land and different organisms can be administered within the limits of our designated jurisdictions. But nature conforms to other rules. Borders within our own countries only serve to bog us down from reaching our true potential together as a team.

Thank you for your time, and may your soul guide you in deciding how you can assist me in this matter.

It is my intention to continue creating awareness on this subject. I would appreciate your comments and suggestions no later than May 15th, 2002.

Sincerely yours,

Len Jubinville
Delclayna Whitetail & Bison Co. Ltd.
RR #2, St. Albert, Alberta Canada T8N 1M9

Phone: 780-973-7020
Fax: 780-973-5110
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4. INDUSTRY OPTIONS TO CWD

[By Dan Marsh, Executive Director, Michigan Deer and Elk Breeders Association, danmarsh@voyager.net]

If you are like me, you are sick of hearing about CWD without a solution or plan. The best advice I can offer is to strengthen your state and national associations by paying your membership dues and donating time and money when possible.

Also, I strongly urge your state to consider using the Michigan law as a model for regulation in your state. The law balances the concerns of the Agriculture Department, the Wildlife Department, legislators, and the industry. The law was purposefully designed to allow rapid and easy implementation of “cervidae disease of the day” into the state program. The industry must get used to this.

The cattle industry has a reportable disease list a mile long while cervidae has very few (five, I think). This does not mean our animals are extremely healthy; it means there is very little known about them. As we discover more about them, we are sure to find new diseases. We need to add to the body of knowledge about the animal for farming purposes and wildlife agency purposes.

The problem is that as we go down that path, many producers leave the industry because of the difficulty, uncertainty, and stress associated with the issues. As more leave the industry, it SEVERELY undermines our political base, and thus our ability to accomplish our goals and be free of overly burdensome rules, regulations, and laws.

The ONLY way to stay viable is to have strong association, lobby and liaison presence in your state capital and pass legislation that provides a positive and predictable business landscape for responsible producers to enter the marketplace and add to our political voice.

Just because you have a closed herd and do not have animals going into and out of your operation does not mean this does not affect you. IT DOES AFFECT YOUR FUTURE - THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. If you do not take a leadership role in controlling our industry, the industry will be marginalized and soon regulated out of existence.

Do not view the DNR attacks and misunderstanding of the industry as evil -- just view their lies that way. They are fearful that our animals carry a disease that affects humans, livestock and their wild deer. They have no other budgets to raid unless they can tie in a human health element or livestock element. They need funding to investigate so they will go to the Dept. of Agriculture, explain in BS terms that they must look near our farms to find CWD. When they find it, they blame the industry and get funding from the Agriculture Dept. to eradicate CWD from the wildlife. This scenario is already happening.

The fact that the industry is not being consulted about CWD is outrageous. The agencies need to talk to those with direct knowledge of cervidae production when preparing reports or promulgating

regulations. When we see animal rights supporters, wildlife biologists (not state vet), lawyers, and bureaucrats acting as advisors and supporters, we are seeing a stacked deck intended to eradicate the industry.

As Thomas Sowell stated in his Easter Sunday (March 31, 2002) nationally syndicated article, "If you were holding a meeting to discuss the problems of the automobile industry, wouldn't you talk with people from General Motors? Someone with a track record of verifiable knowledge -- as distinguished from bold assertions -- that would qualify as someone who knows what they are talking about.

The article made these valid points...

“Hitler never took Genetics I, but ran a country and murdered millions of people on the basis of his own ignorant radical theories. Vladimir Lenin took control of the Russian government, and also of industry and agriculture, even though he had no experience in either. Immediately, there was a fuel shortage that left water pipes freezing in Moscow -- in a country with more oil than any other country outside the Middle East. Hunger and starvation plagued the Soviet Union for decades -- in a land of renowned fertility and a previous history of exporting surplus food. History is replete with fiascoes that have been created by listening to "experts" without any expertise. Suffering has resulted where people bought rhetoric instead of facts and reason.”

The registration system in the Michigan law is the key concern to legislators and agency people. This mandatory registration and identification program is the result of the new law passed in 2000 that became effective in 2001. The registration implements a state-wide system that allows for disease surveillance, monitoring, and trace-back of diseased animals.

There are additional benefits of this registration/identification program for the cervidae production industry concerning food safety issues. While food safety issues are not the focus of this program, the cervidae production industry can use the identification and registration program to meet increasing consumer demands that require documentation of where and how the products they buy are produced. It is only a matter of time before all animals entering the food chain will be required to disclose where they were produced.

Therefore, the identification/registration program makes two contributions to the cervidae production industry. One, it supports the disease monitoring/surveillance/eradication programs and two, the cervidae production industry will be positioned to meet identification requirements that will come to the meat industry in the near future. The ability to trace back animals found to be positive for a reportable disease and the ability to provide documentation and accountability in enhancing food safety and consumer acceptability is an additional benefit the industry can claim.

We are in a meat market out of necessity. This opportunity provides a commercially viable alternative for producers to slaughter their cull, animals will help with understanding our role in CWD eradication programs. The more carcasses that are provided for study, the more we will know about the disease, its implications to animal and human health, and to our industry. We bring a lot to the relationship/ partnership with state agencies ... we just need to make the invitation to help them ... just like they help us.

Contact me for a copy of Michigan's law and legislative analysis to help with your state association's decision to begin the process for a more positive business landscape, beginning with positive legislative and regulations.

Let me know if this helps.

Dan Marsh
Phone: 810-329-8751
Fax: 810-329-8761

5. INDUSTRY NEWS

Here are some news and developments from the deer and elk farming industry. For daily updates, please visit our Deer Discussion Forums located at <http://www.deerforum.com>.

CWD found in Alberta

The first case of CWD in an elk in Alberta (Canada) was discovered in March on a farm just northwest of Edmonton. The disease was discovered during routine testing of elk that were slaughtered by AWAPCO. Even though there is no evidence that CWD poses any threat to humans, the meat from all the animals slaughtered was incinerated.

Trace-outs from the affected farm are expected to be completed by the end of April 2002. The finding of CWD in Alberta was unexpected as the province has been totally closed to deer and elk imports since 1989. For more information and updates, please contact the Alberta Elk Association office at info@albertaelk.com

EVA protects liver

Recent research by Dr. Susan Hemmings, a professor of physiology at the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan, (Canada) found that elk velvet antler may protect the liver from disease.

Dr. Hemmings is continuing her research supported by a grant from the Elk Research Council. More information on this research will be reported in the May issue of the Digest.

Staff changes at NAEBA

This week, NAEBA hired a new publications manager, Caryn Vaught, who was originally responsible for making our journal the award-winning publication it is today. Caryn was forced to leave NAEBA two years ago for personal reasons, and we are glad to welcome her back.

In response to many of your comments, the journal will be changing its format to make it an even more vital publication to the industry and to stimulate new and increasing readership. When I was a new elk breeder, I learned from the journal how to bottle-feed a calf, grow a pasture for velvet, and address other elk farming issues. We will add more in-depth current affairs articles and will bring

you some timely and practical articles on husbandry, including new and time-tested ideas for calving, breeding, and velvetting.

With respect to membership service, Michelle Fleshman in our NAEBA office will oversee the regional association contact services. To handle the timely dissemination of information and publications, we are developing a regional association web site off our membership site. This section of our site will give you online access to NAEBA publications on cutting edge issues affecting our industry and will be operational in the next several weeks. If you have any questions call or email Michelle at *Michelle@naelk.org*.

Henry Kriegel and the Kriegel Marketing Group will continue to manage our external communications and coordinate our public relations efforts, particularly with chronic wasting disease and other challenges.

To keep members informed of breaking news reaching the media, each day NAEBA will be posting all relevant news articles on the elk industry on our web site. This enables you to stay informed on the latest media coverage simply by logging on to our members' site.

Lisa Villella
Executive Director
North American Elk Breeders Association

[Rebecca Terry and Paula Southman are no longer with NAEBA. We wish them the best of success with their new ventures and thank them for all the work they did on behalf of the industry. Ed.]

6. EVENTS CALENDAR

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

CHEMICAL IMMOBILIZATION OF ANIMALS seminar will be held on April 20-21, 2002 at the Penn Aviation Airport, Williamsport, PA. The seminar, put on by Safe Capture International, Inc., and sponsored by Pneu-Dart, will consist of 16 hours of training by Dr. Keith Amass. Advanced registration is only \$375. For more information and to register, phone 608-767-3071, or *mailto:safecapture@aol.com* or visit their web site at *http://www.safecapture.com*

ILLINOIS DEER FARMERS ASSOCIATION will be holding an organizational meeting on May 4, 2002 at the Farm Bureau, 1102 West Evergreen, Effingham, Illinois. For more information contact Don Wages at 309-744-2524 or *mailto:donchris@elpaso.net*

PENNSYLVANIA DEER FARMERS ASSOCIATION will be holding an organizational meeting on May 11, 2002 at the Penn State University Agricultural arena. Event will include speakers, a meeting and a fund-raising auction. For more information call Dianne Miller at 814-797-1230 or Bob Lieberum at 814-782-3292

DEER BRANCH NEW ZEALAND VETERINARY ASSOCIATION Annual Seminar will be held in Nelson, New Zealand May 15-17, 2002. This is a technical conference for veterinarians, researchers and advanced farmers. This conference will be in the week preceding the NZ Deer

Farmers' Association Conference in Wellington. Enquiries to Peter Wilson, at <mailto:P.R.Wilson@massey.ac.nz> or fax 0064 6 3505616

IOWA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION SUMMER MEETING will be held at the Guthrie Center, Iowa on June 29, 2002. For more information contact Peni at <mailto:tusseyelk@yahoo.com> or phone 641-782-2903

ALBERTA ELK EXPO 2002 will be held in Vermilion on July 19 and 20, 2002. The event will be hosted by the Elk Point Chapter of the Alberta Elk Association. For more information contact the AEA office at 780-980-7582 or <mailto:info@albertaelk.com>

NAEBA INTERNATIONAL ANTLER COMPETITION will be held at the KCI Expo Center, Kansas City Missouri USA Aug. 2 to 4, 2002. For more information contact Peni at <mailto:peni@naelk.org> or phone 816-431-3605 or 641-782-3765

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL DEER BIOLOGY CONGRESS will be held August 25-30, 2002 in Quebec City, Canada. For more information contact Michel Crete at 418-521-3955

NORTH AMERICAN ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION (NAEBA) Convention will be held Feb. 5-8, 2003 at St. Louis Missouri USA. Contact the NAEBA office at <mailto:info@naelk.org> or visit <http://www.naelk.org> for more information.

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 <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 at <http://www.deerfarmer.com/forms/guest.htm>

The *Digest* is also available in a print format (ISSN 1499-1349). A \$3 per issue (\$36 per year) fee applies to cover postage, paper and handling costs. Subscriptions and back issues can be ordered from our Store located at <http://store.deerfarmer.com>

As per our 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.

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

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