

Welcome to the FEBRUARY 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.

A copy of ALL the issues of the *Deer Farmers' Digest* can be found at <http://digest.deerfarmer.com> and in the National Library of Canada at http://collection.nlc-bnc.ca/100/201/300/deer_farmers_digest/.

Please forward this copy of the *Deer Farmers' Digest* to your friends and any other people who may be interested in deer, elk or reindeer.

To ADD or REMOVE your name from our mailing list, please see Subscription Services below.

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NOTICE OF ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING – WHITETAIL DEER FARMERS OF OHIO

Saturday, March 2, 2002 - Redoy Acres – Fredricksburg, Ohio

Contact Steve Laughlin, phone 330-866-5421 or sklisret@earthlink.net

IMPORTANT MEETING FOR THE FUTURE OF DEER FARMING IN OHIO – PLEASE ATTEND TO HEAR INDUSTRY SPEAKERS AND ELECT A BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

1. A NATURAL OPPORTUNITY FOR VENISON

[By Russell Sawchuk from market research reports on organics prepared by Rosalie Cunningham and Betty Vladicka of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development]

“While total consumption of food and beverages in North America and Western Europe is stagnating or merely reflecting population growth, organic food sales are growing at 20% annually.”

If the deer and elk farming industries can get their minds off breeding stock, antlers and hunting preserves for a moment, and concentrate on their other major product – venison – they will see a golden opportunity staring them in the face!

In this article, I will look at the rapidly growing “organic” or natural food markets – trends, drivers and consumer profiles. I believe deer and elk farmers are well positioned to take advantage of the increasing demand by consumers for natural products. However, the industry has to get off its collective butt and move to capture its share of these emerging markets.

Organic food, also referred to as organics, is food grown under a production system that promotes soil health, biodiversity, low stress management of animals, and sound environmental practices without the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators and livestock feed additives. The use of genetically modified crops, irradiation and sewer sludge is also prohibited.

In 2000, worldwide sales of organic food products were estimated to be \$20 billion (US), which is two percent of the total food industry, with average growth rates of 15-20%. Sales in the US were \$7.8 billion (US), Western Europe \$7.2 billion and Canada \$1 billion (Cdn). Although organic trade worldwide accounts for a small sector of the food industry, it has become the fastest growing segment.

The drivers behind this rapid growth are an increased consumer emphasis on health and nutrition, an aging population, and consumer concerns about food safety, environmental protection, sustainable agriculture and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Other factors fuelling this growth include increased distribution into mass-market and natural food supermarket chains, more competitive prices, entry of large mainstream food marketers, sophisticated advertising campaigns and increased availability of organic ingredient supplies.

In the United States, organic acreage has nearly tripled in the last seven years. In Canada, there were about 2,300 certified producers in 1999, a 20% increase from 1998. About 3% of Europe’s farmland is devoted to organic production. The governments of Germany, Switzerland and Austria are offering farmers cash incentives to shift into organic production. Currently 10% of agricultural land in Austria is certified organic.

Consumer profile

Of ten countries sampled in an Environics study, those who frequently purchase organic food range from 40% of the Canadian population, 36% in the US to 63% in Germany; the average was 47%. Other surveys indicate that around 50% of US consumers are frequent buyers of organics. The organic consumer profile is demographically similar to the mainstream.

The reasons given for buying organic food are concerns about pesticides, pollution and food safety in traditional food. The top five concerns in the US and the other countries studied are bacterial contamination; pollution in the air, water and soil; food safety; use of chemical pesticides; and, diseases that animals may pass to humans. Canadians are also concerned about antibiotic and hormone use (83%) and GMOs (74%), as is the rest of the world.

Roughly two-thirds of the population in most countries believe that organic food is safer and healthier, and about the same proportion are willing to pay a ten percent premium for it. The intention of consumers to buy more organic food ranges from 16% in the US to 53% in India; worldwide it is approximately 30%. Consumer perception is that organic production practices address many of their health and safety concerns.

Where do consumers buy their organic food? In the United States, some 49% of organic purchases are made at some mass-market outlet such as supermarkets. Health and natural food stores account for the other 48% and farmers' markets for the remaining 3%.

What influences food purchase decisions? According to a 1996 report on Canadian eating habits, the following factors were the most important: taste (93%), nutrition and health (89%), ease of preparation (68%), preparation time (66%) and price (62%). Venison producers, take note.

Research has found that there are three main triggers that convince people to choose organic food: a) children, b) specific food allergies, and c) healthy lifestyles.

Children are an important part of the equation in organics. They have a great deal of influence directly on the food purchases as time-pressed parents enlist their children in food shopping and preparation. These young future consumers are savvy about food, nutrition and health issues.

Another factor related to choosing organics is that people worry more about what their children eat than what they themselves eat. Findings that "...children have heightened vulnerability to a variety of exposures as a consequence of their developmental, behavioural and physiological characteristics" have influenced parents' concerns about their children's diet. Seventeen percent of households have a member on a special diet. Sixty percent of shoppers base their purchases on disease management or risk reduction. Today, it is estimated that 1-2% of adults and 4-6% of children have food allergies.

Issues

Ecolabel categories have developed as a marketing strategy to address consumer concerns. Food ecolabels include organic, natural, pesticide-free, free range, farmed free, no antibiotics and other. An American survey showed that 75% of consumers believe that "all-natural" and organic mean the same thing. Further proliferation of these labels without consumer education will likely add to the confusion.

Consumers, producers and processors all agree that national standards and use of a nationally sanctioned label would provide a more consistent meaning of "organic", facilitate market growth, build consumer confidence and help reduce the current confusion caused by the multitude of ecolabels. Presently, there is no policing of organic standards or the use of the term "organics" in Canada.

In the United States, when the National Organic Program is implemented, it will be a federal offense to label any product organic unless it has been certified. All uses of the term organic will be regulated. Organic authenticity must be verified for exports to Europe. Of course, the standards for organic certification in the United States and Europe are different.

It is obvious that farm-raised venison fits nicely within the definition of an organic product and thus has great potential in organic meat markets. However, to be successful in this marketplace, producers will have to go through a process of being “certified organic,” especially in the United States to meet regulatory requirements.

In a future article, I will describe the processes and requirements that venison producers will have to meet in order to become “certified organic.” Meanwhile, take a careful look at this opportunity, and begin thinking and planning about what you as a potential venison producer have to do to profit from it.

2. DEWORMING DEER AND ELK

*[By Thelma Morgan, Birchwood Deer Farm, Pennsylvania USA, and advisor to Deerfarmer.com
Thelma is also a moderator of our Discussion Forums and can be reached at
<http://www.deerforum.com>]*

Safeguard and Panacur are just a couple of names for the anthelmintic (anti-parasitic) drug fenbendazole. It is available for oral administration (granules, crumbles & paste) and in some cases by prescription only. It is moderately effective in treating intestinal worms and lungworm but not particularly effective on adult liver flukes. Withdrawal times established in New Zealand range from 4-14 days. Suggested time is 14 days in the United States.

(NOTE: AMDUCA - Animal Medicinal Drug Use Clarification Act - does not allow extra-label drug use (ELDU) of feed mixed anthelmintics, but does allow pour-ons, oral, injectible and water-mixed medications. None are approved for use in cervids aside from ELDU application. Canada has approved the use of Ivomec Eprinex for cervid livestock.)

The most effective recommended dewormer for cervids is Cydectin (moxidectin) which is a pour-on. Label directions should be carefully read for this application to assure maximum effectiveness. (NOTE: not to be given to fawns with little body fat or emaciated adults.) Meat withdrawal times are not established in USA or Canada. NZ rates 21 withholding, and Australia approves 7 days. Suggested withdrawal interval (WDI) in USA is 21 days.

Levasol (levamisole) is not effective in deer species, according to Dr. Ken Waldrup of the Small Ruminant Practitioner's Association and the Texas Animal Health Association. Valbazen (albendazole) dewormer should not be used on pregnant does, as it is known to cause birth defects.

Ivomec (ivermectin) is available in sub-cutaneous injectible form as well as pour-on. Veterinarians tell me that it is just as effective to give the injectible form orally. Promectin (generally used for horses) is basically the same thing. Ivomec Plus includes a liver-fluke additive. Ivomec F is NOT effective against liver flukes. Ivermectin's withdrawal time is 28 days in New Zealand for the pour-on. No time established for sub-cutaneous. Suggested withdrawal here in USA is 56 days.

NOTE: It is recommended that in whitetail deer the dosages be doubled when treating for intestinal worms.

Ivomec and Cydectin deliver anthelmintics for control of gastrointestinal roundworms, lungworm, liverflukes in some forms, cattle grubs, sucking lice and mange mites.

October and April are months to routinely deworm deer. A repeat dose should be given in approximately 30 days. Even if only one animal is diagnosed, the entire herd should be treated with a preventive dose and afflicted animals should receive the treatment dose.

Fecal testing does not always tell the true story. Since first-round treatments may knock down the egg-laying process, second fecal samples tested may show “negative” infestation. Best to be safe rather than sorry and give the second round of dewormer to be sure.

Pour-on dewormers are usually most easily applied to tame deer. All others will have to be run through a chute or immobilized for the process of pour-ons or sub-cutaneous injection. Deer farmers must assess the risks of confinement or chemical immobilization against the benefits of deworming.

It is important to use preventative measures such as anthelmintic therapies coupled with pasture rotation to prevent repopulation after parasitic invasion. Quarantine of newly acquired animals for at least 30 days is also beneficial in determining if they are carrying unwanted parasites and preventing an outbreak in a clean herd. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Deworming should not be done on a continuing basis. Constant exposure to the anthelmintics creates parasites that are more and more likely to be resistant to the drugs.

Use only under the advice of your veterinarian, even if the medications are available over-the-counter.

The updated AMDUCA regulations and brochures are available upon request from <http://www.avma.org>

3. DIGEST ANNUAL READERSHIP PROFILE

At the beginning of every year, we like to take a look at our *Digest* readership profile. This profile is based on the people registered on our mailing list, but does not include those reading the newsletter directly from our web site, nor those accessing the *Digest* through the National Library of Canada (electronic or print).

This year we have collected additional data on the *Digest* through our on-line survey located at <http://survey.steppingstones.ca> We will share that feedback with you along with our responses to your suggestions.

Subscriber demographics

As of February 10, 2002 we had 2,860 people in our Deerfarmer database (2,106 in February 2001). The distribution by country has remained relatively the same – 72% from the United States (70% last year), 20% from Canada (24% last year) and 8% from other countries. Subscribers from other countries include Australia (117), New Zealand (36), Mexico (14), United Kingdom (6), Argentina (5) and one or two from 21 other countries.

Further broken down by state, the largest number of subscribers come from Pennsylvania (221), followed by Wisconsin (212), Minnesota (181), Texas (179), Michigan (114), Iowa (95), Colorado (86) and Illinois (67). There are subscribers from 37 other U.S. states.

In Canada, the largest number come from Alberta (331), followed by Saskatchewan (115), Ontario (80) and Quebec (13).

As far as we know, 65% of our subscriber list are deer or elk farmers. We also have significant numbers of government (44), university (21) and veterinarian (25) readers.

Digest survey results

As of this writing, some 56 people had completed the on-line survey. Of the respondents, 73% were from the USA, 18% from Canada, 5% from other countries, and 4% didn't say where they were from. This distribution is very similar to that of our overall subscriber list described above and is thus representative of our readers.

Analysis of survey respondents showed that 55% said they were whitetail deer farmers, 23% were elk farmers, 21% raised other deer species, 9% represented an association and 9% represented interested persons. Some 48% were members of a national deer/elk association, and 61% were members of a state, provincial or regional association.

Some 38% of our readers have been with us for 19 to 24 months; 25% have been readers for 13 to 18 months; 20% for 6 to 12 months and 16% less than 6 months.

Most readers (57%) found out about the Digest from the Deerfarmer.com web site. Another 18% found it in their e-mail box and 13% found it using a search engine. Friends and other publications were insignificant sources of information about the Digest.

The computer screen is the preferred method of reading the Digest (64%). Some 21% read it off the web site, and another 5% print out the Word version and read it on paper. Some 36% of the subscribers read "all" of the Digest, while another 23% read "most" of it. About 34% browse it and another 5% skim it. After they have finished reading the Digest, about a third (36%) save it (the e-mail version), 23% print it out and file it, while 20% delete it. (All issues are available on the Deerfarmer web site and the National Library of Canada).

In terms of overall satisfaction with the Digest, nearly half (48%) are "very satisfied" and another 38% are satisfied. The rest (16%) are unsure or dissatisfied. Some 43% of the respondents feel the Digest is "better" or "much better" than other similar publications; another 29% feel it is as good. Nearly a quarter (23%) had no opinion and 1 respondent said the Digest was not as good.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents said the Digest was “very useful” in promoting and advancing the deer/elk farming industry. Another 27% said it was “somewhat useful.” When it came to the usefulness of the Digest to their own operations, some 36% said it was “very useful,” while another 50% said the Digest was “somewhat useful.”

Usefulness of the various aspects of the Digest were ranked as follows: articles (91%), site news (61%), Association news (54%), from the Editor (37%) and Calendar (34%). I would have thought the Calendar would have ranked higher. “From the Editor” is only done once or twice a year, so I don’t have a problem with that. Association news is ranked high, so this is a message to associations to make greater use of the Digest in getting your information out. For example, no one other than the Canadian Cervid Council took up my offer to publish their “annual report” in the Digest.

Respondents ranked useful topics as follows: Animal care, health and welfare (86%), animal husbandry and breeding (84%), industry issues (80%), production – nutrition, fencing (79%), business – marketing (75%), personal stories and experiences (59%), industry building (52%), venison (39%), and fiction (7%). Health and production issues are still at the top, although the business aspect ranks up there as well. I was surprised by the usefulness of personal stories and experiences. It is an area where I will try and get more articles.

One of the key reasons for the survey was that I wanted some direction on the format and distribution of the Digest. In terms of length of the Digest (12 to 18 pages), most people (50%) want to keep it the same. Another 21% don’t have an opinion, while 16% want it longer, and 11% want it shorter. My major concern was that the newsletter was too long. All the “experts” say a newsletter should be short and brief. Also, a shorter newsletter would be less work. No way am I going to make it any longer – so it looks like more of the same!

In terms of frequency, 73% said they like it monthly. Some 11% would like to see it every two weeks, and another 11% would like to see it weekly. So monthly it will continue to be.

In addition to the e-mail version, each edition of the Digest is published on the Deerfarmer.com web site at <http://digest.deerfarmer.com> and at the National Library of Canada (electronically and in print). So I have often wondered, why do I send out 12 to 18 pages to 2,800 people every month? Why not just send out a notice that the newsletter has been published, or just post a notice on the web site?

I guess I now know why! Some 70% of the respondents indicated they prefer to receive the Digest via e-mail in a text only version (which is we have been doing all along). Another 13% said they would prefer to receive an e-mail notice only. One person told me that they like the e-mail version because they can easily forward it to their friends and other deer farmers. And since most people save a personal copy of each edition (see above), this gives them a way to build up their own library. I guess I better not mess with the distribution method either.

Finally, as you all know, the Digest generates no revenues to cover expenses associated with its production and distribution. It is entirely subsidized by my other consulting activities through Steppingstones Partnership. So a couple of questions were asked in the survey to assess the willingness of readers to contribute financially to the Digest.

In terms of revenue options, some 68% said they would support advertising in the newsletter, 38% support voluntary contributions and donations, while only 20% were in favour of subscription fees. Of those that would accept subscriptions, 25% felt \$20/year would be okay, 22% said \$10 to \$15, and 15% said \$25 to \$30. Some 38% did not have an opinion as to the fee amount although they supported subscriptions. I don't see any support for subscriptions, but may consider including a paid ad or two in each edition.

Conclusions

So my conclusions based on the survey results? Don't mess with success! Based on your feedback and comments, I don't really see any pressing reasons to make major changes regarding the Digest – maybe just some fine tuning. I guess this is confirmed by the very few people that have asked to be removed from our mailing list, the lack of complaints, and the stream of people each week asking to subscribe.

Thank you to all the people who took the time to respond to the survey. Your feedback and continuing support is greatly appreciated.

NOW A PLUG: I now have in place some highly efficient and sophisticated systems to collect and analyze data. The on-line survey responses are stored automatically in an electronic file. The data file can be read directly by SPSS, an industrial strength statistical analysis program. Using SPSS, I can do some very advanced “data mining” analyses. I also have the know-how since my graduate degree was in research and statistics.

So, if you as an association, or your company, has need for state-of-the-art data collection and analysis services, please let me know. We will be happy to provide you with a specific quote and/or a proposal.

4. WHY ELK DIE

[Prepared by Russell Sawchuk from a presentation by Dr. John Berezowski, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Saskatchewan, given at the Alberta Elk Association Conference at Red Deer in January 2002.]

This research project was carried out in 1999-2000. Questionnaires were sent to 648 respondents in Canada and the United States. Some 256 (40%) were returned and serve as the basis of these research findings. The total number of elk in the study was 11,085 of which 12.7% were bred cows and 3.9% were bred heifers.

The crude mortality rate for elk in 1999-2000, considered a typical year, was as follows: overall (4.9%), calf (9.8%), yearling (2.9%) and adult (2.6%).

Calf mortality rates were the highest. Death among this group were: due to abortion (0.6%), during calving (2.6%), to 1 month of age (5.1%), one month to weaning (1.5%), at weaning (.03%) and weaning to one year (1.6%). It was felt that the abortion rate was under-reported. Some 12.7% of cows did not calve, and abortion was responsible in 4.9% of the cases.

With calving deaths, in 43.7% of the cases the calf died, and in 9.1% of the cases the cow died. The rate of calving mortality was higher among heifers (8.1%) than cows (4.5%).

The reasons for calf mortality up to one year of age are as follows: no reason known (26%), trauma (17%), scours (13%), no milk (12%), pneumonia (7%), abandoned (5%), bloat (4%), over-mothering (3%), illness (2%), predation (2%) and miscellaneous (9%). Some 20% of the mortality is due to maternal factors. These cows should be culled!

How successful was treatment of sick calves? In 36.4% there were no warning signs before the calf died. In 51.8% of the cases, the sick calves died.

Here are the causes of death among yearling and adult elk: trauma (19%), no diagnosis (16%), dystocia (8%), capture myopathy (5%), kidney failure (4%), pneumonia (4%), enteritis (4%), abdominal ulcer (4%), grain overload (2%), hardware (2%) and miscellaneous (34%) including various diseases. The treatment success was such that 64.6% died with no warning; 42.7% of the sick animals died.

The overall rate of handling injuries was 1.2%. The case fatality rate was 10.2% (died after injury). Among yearling bulls, the rate was 3.0% while with adult bulls it was 1.6%. Clearly risks to younger bulls are higher, but it appears the industry is doing a good job in keeping mortality down due to handling of the animals.

The researchers looked at how mortality rates affected productivity and thus profitability. The study found that of the 4,168 females bred, 3,336 yearlings were produced while 832 yearlings were lost. This represents an 80% productivity rate.

Why were these yearlings lost? Abortion accounted for 1.3%, disease for 11.2%, non-disease mortality for 25% and failure to calve 60.7%. Therefore, the researchers concluded that infectious disease is NOT the major cause of lost income.

The researchers made 3 recommendations as to ways to increase productivity:

1. Increase reproductive performance through nutrition and culling poor cows.
2. Decrease maternal mortalities by aggressively culling poor performing cows.
3. Decrease trauma.

[To me this data shows the elk farming industry is doing an excellent job in keeping mortality rates below 5%; these rates can be reduced even more, and productivity significantly increased, if elk farmers were to cull the elk cows that make poor mothers. This data also needs to be made public to counter the arguments of game farming opponents who claim infectious diseases are rampant in our industry. Ed.]

5. DEER SAVE BUNNY'S LIFE

[By Thelma Morgan. With all the serious things happening in our industry, it's great to be able to print something positive and light-hearted. Ed.]

Yesterday I looked out to the deer pen at the crack of dawn and saw 2 of our 2 1/2 year old bucks licking on something foreign in the pen near the fence. I could have sworn they had a lollipop, they were so engrossed in licking it. Then one of the bucks pushed the other away and continued the licking.

As the sun kept coming up I had a little more light to see there was something stuck in the fence. Fearing that the object was deliberately placed there and could be hazardous, I radioed to our herdsman to check it out. He was in the opposite pen so I decided to go out and "shoo" the bucks away from whatever they were licking on.

I stood on the deck and scolded them in hopes they would walk away. They didn't. Ole Charlie and Weebo just kept on licking. So, I put on the barn boots, packed the .38 and the talkabout and off I went. As I approached the fence the boys finally decided to leave and I saw something twitching in the fence. I drew my weapon and radioed the herdsman that a shot may be fired.

I could barely contain myself when I got to the fence and saw this small (less than brilliant) rabbit stuck in the 2" x 4" welded wire fence. It just kept trying to scramble forward and was exhausted from its fruitless efforts. Of all things! If he/she wanted in THAT badly, there were places near the feeder to easily crawl under. It was wedged at the hips and couldn't go any further.

Those bucks appeared to have been consoling the little rabbit with all that licking. I wonder if they didn't know that SOMEONE would be here shortly to put it out of its misery (one way or another).

I radioed back to the herdsman (laughing, so hard I had to repeat myself) that all was secure and no shots would be fired. I grabbed the little guy by the back legs and tugged him backward. He squealed as I extricated him. (The coyote hunters in the house are telling me I should have packed the tape recorder instead of the pistol!) I let him loose and he staggered off to the amazement of the deer and a couple of goats that had witnessed the entire scene. The deer went back to grazing as if nothing had ever happened.

Lucky for the rabbit, my stewpot isn't that small!

6. EVENTS CALENDAR

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

WORLD DEER CONGRESS III and NADEFA 2002 annual conference will be held on Feb. 20 to 23, 2002 in Austin Texas USA. For more information, call 301-459-7708 or <mailto:info@nadefa.org> or visit their website at <http://www.nadefa.org>

TRANQUILIZATION AND REMOTE ANESTHESIA OF DEER AND ELK workshop will be offered by Dr. Keith Amass and Dr. Mark Drew for Safe-Capture International on Feb. 23-24,

2002 at the Doubletree Hotel, in Austin Texas (a post-conference workshop held in conjunction with the World Deer Congress). For more information and/or to register contact Safe-Capture International at <mailto:safecaptur@aol.com> or phone 1-608-767-3071, fax: 1-608-767-3071 or visit their website at <http://www.safecapture.com>

REINDEER OWNER'S AND BREEDER'S ASSOCIATION Annual Meeting and Conference will be held on Feb. 22-24, 2002 at Frankenmuth, MI USA. For more information phone Gordon at 616-772-2584 or <mailto:gpoest@novagate.com>

SASKATCHEWAN ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION 2002 Convention and General Meeting will be held on March 7 – 9th, 2002 at the Delta Bessborough Hotel, in Saskatoon, Sask. Canada. For more information, please contact the SEBA office at 306-337-1530 (phone), 306-337-1531 (fax) or <mailto:seba@sk.sympatico.ca>

SASKATCHEWAN WHITE TAIL AND MULE DEER PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION will hold their 2002 annual convention on March 15-17, 2002 at the Delta Hotel in Regina. For more information contact Lisa at <mailto:info@saskdeer.com>

NORTH AMERICAN ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION 12th Annual Convention will be held on March 21-24, 2002 at the Riviera, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. For more information contact <mailto:info@naelk.org> or phone 816-431-3605.

ALBERTA WHITETAIL AND MULE DEER ASSOCIATION Annual Convention will be held at the Capri (Red Deer, Alberta, Canada) April 5 to 7, 2001. For more information contact AWMDA at <mailto:info@albertadeer.com> or visit their web site at <http://www.albertadeer.com>

WHITETAILS OF WISCONSIN ANNUAL MEETING will be held on April 6, 2002 at the Stoney Creek Inn, Wausau, WI. For more information see <http://www.whitetailsofwisconsin.com> or e-mail <mailto:info@whitetailsofwisconsin.com>

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:safecaptur@aol.com> or visit their web site at <http://www.safecapture.com>

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

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

7. DEERFARMER.COM NEWS

Here is what been happening recently at Deefarmer.com:

1. *Deerfarmer.com is No. 1* – Based on our traffic (40,000 to 60,000 visits per month) I suspected that Deerfarmer.com was one of the top web sites catering to the deer/elk farming industry. However, I could never confirm this since independent verification was impossible – no one else really publishes, makes public, or would tell me their site statistics.

However, thanks to Alexa, a free browser add-on program – available at <http://download.alexa.com/> - I was able to get some independent data on how Deerfarmer.com compared to the others. When you visit a web site, Alexa gives you a ranking based on the traffic to that site. For example, Google is ranked 4, Yahoo 8, Microsoft 24 and so on. Deerfarmer.com is ranked at 324,334, not bad when you consider there are probably 20 million sites out there. Our Classifieds – <http://ads.deerfarmer.com> – did the best with a ranking of 258,344, almost 66,000 positions higher than the main site. The Photo Gallery – <http://photos.deerfarmer.com> – was ranked at 277,665, while Deerfarmer.net, our site for client deer web sites, was ranked at 505,131. Our Discussion Forums, located at <http://www.deerforum.com> came in at 742,112.

Our nearest competitor was *Wapiti.net* who was ranked at 578,133. Our Deer and Elk Farm Directory – <http://www.globaldeer.com> – ranked at 734,126. Other industry sites were ranked down the list, e.g., NAEBA at 1.1 million, NADeFA at 1.3 million,. Download and install Alexa and check the rankings yourself. The rankings appear to be updated every couple of weeks.

Alexa is a useful little tool for marketing applications as well. For example, I am looking for on-line classified sites to advertise our Arthritis in Dogs products. Alexa tells me immediately the ranking of the site, and I know whether it is worth advertising on it or not. If a site ranks over 2 million, I probably won't bother; however if it ranks 20,000 or less, then even paid advertising is worth the investment. I have discovered that you really can't tell from a site itself how many visitors it gets.

2. *Russell Sawchuk to present at NAEBA Convention* – I have been invited to do a couple of sessions at the upcoming NAEBA Convention being held in Las Vegas on March 21 to 24, 2002. I will be speaking on "Marketing during Difficult Times" on Saturday 10:45 – 11:45 am and Sunday 9:30 – 10:30 am. Please plan to join us. I look forward to meeting many of our elk farmer readers of the Digest at the Convention.

3. *New web sites* – we have been busy over the last few weeks setting up new web sites and updating a few of our existing client sites. We welcome <http://www.4M-Ranch.com> to our family of deer/elk sites located at Deerfarmer.net. 4M Ranch raises whitetail deer and elk in Florida. They have been successful in raising large-bodied and large-antlered whitetails in the sunny south.

Two other new sites are now on-line. One is <http://www.vencana.com> (under construction) which is the official site of the Alberta Wapiti Venison Co-op. Vencana is the brand name for the elk venison products the Co-op is marketing.

Our other new site is <http://www.arthritis-in-dogs.com>. This site is designed mainly to sell dog health products such as Qeva Mobility for Dogs, which contains significant amounts of elk velvet

antler. Arthritis-in-Dogs has an electronic store, information and resources and free classified ads (also accessible through <http://www.dog-ads.com>). We have also started publishing a free electronic business newsletter for the canine industry called “Dogs & Dollars Digest” that is available at <http://www.dog-digest.com> Free trial samples of Qeva are available in return for data. The dog health market offers a huge potential for our products and industry. Please let people know about this site.

The DSK Ranch website has been updated and can be viewed at <http://www.dskranch.com>. Dave King is certainly one of the leaders in the industry, and his whitetails genetics and professional services confirm this.

4. *Cybercervus closed* – I noticed that there is a “closed” sign over at the cybercervus web site. Cybercervus was one of the original web sites set up, probably in 1996 or 1997, to provide information on deer and other alternative livestock. However, it is a tough and competitive business to be in. We thank Yasime Hudson for her contributions to our industry and wish her the very best of success in her future ventures.

8. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

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9. 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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