

Welcome to the JULY 2001 edition of the *Deer Farmers’ Digest*, a monthly electronic newsletter published for those interested in raising deer, elk and reindeer. This *Digest* is distributed via e-mail to over 2,400 readers in 24 countries. A copy of ALL the issues of the *Digest* can be found at <http://digest.deerfarmer.com>

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1. A CASE FOR LEGALIZING CERVID HARVEST PRESERVES

The Alberta Elk Association (AEA) and the Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer Association (AWMDA) are requesting changes in legislation and regulations to legalize “cervid harvest preserves” (CHPs), or hunt farms, in Alberta. The Associations are holding joint public information sessions across the province to make the public aware of the proposal and to hear their comments and concerns. (The CHP proposal is available at <http://www.deerfarmer.com/CHP>).

Game farming was legalized in Alberta (Canada) in 1991, when the Government of Alberta passed the “Livestock Industry Diversification Act” (LIDA) and Regulation that permitted game farming in the province. The Act limits game farming in Alberta to white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk and moose. The Act does not permit paid hunting on these private operations.

Since the inception of the game farming industry in the province a decade ago, the industry has grown dramatically. The Associations now represent 560 game farms (about 410 elk and 150 deer farms) raising an estimated 50,000 animals (40,000 elk and 10,000 whitetail/mule deer in 2001). (In comparison, the 1997 wild deer populations in Alberta, based on aerial surveys, were about 230,000 white-tailed deer, 116,000 mule deer and 21,000 elk). Finding markets for these farmed animals and related products is becoming a major concern for the producers.

There are four major markets for the deer and elk raised on Alberta farms – breeders, velvet antler, venison (meat) and the hunting trophy markets. Elk velvet antler has been sold mainly to Korea for use as health food supplements. Within the last year, Korea has refused to accept antler from Canada and the United States due to disease concerns. When these markets will reopen is unknown.

Venison is a lean, healthy meat product, much prized in many parts of the world, especially Europe. However, when the price of velvet antler was high, elk were too valuable to slaughter for venison. With the establishment of the Alberta Wapiti Products Co-op (see article below), this meat market is finally being developed and will consume many of these animals.

Finally, many older whitetail bucks and elk bulls are sold to hunting preserves in the United States. In 2000, over 1,000 animals were shipped to the USA. The Alberta Associations argue that if cervid harvest preserves were permitted, these animals would stay in the province and generate new businesses, jobs and significant benefits for the local economy.

CHPs proposal

Here are the major points regarding the AEA and AWMDA proposal:

1. A CHP would be licensed separately, not as an elk or deer production farm. A deer or elk farmer could own both enterprises but they would have to be operated on separate (and private, deeded, not Crown) land.
2. The size of each CHP would be determined by terrain and available cover to ensure a memorable hunting experience and fair chase. The current proposed minimum size is 600 acres.
3. Guides will be employed to ensure that all hunts are conducted in a humane and professional manner.
4. All animals will be purchased from game farm herds that have healthy, tested animals. All animals that enter a preserve will be tagged and a DNA sample stored. All harvests must then have tags checked and DNA verified as required.
5. All trophy heads and antlers taken from CHPs will be permanently marked to differentiate them from antlers taken from the wild.

A code of ethics has been developed to outline the Alberta Cervid Producers definition of an acceptable private hunting operation. These state that:

1. The operation should ensure harvesting in an area which, through a combination of size, terrain and vegetative cover, provides an animal with a reasonable opportunity to avoid being found and, having been found, to evade the hunter indefinitely.
2. Harvesting operations should offer hunting opportunities for physically challenged hunters.
3. Trophy operations should be enclosed with adequate fencing that excludes wild animals from the enclosure and retains commercially-raised animals within the enclosure. Inside the trophy operations, only commercially-raised animals will be harvested.

4. Trophy animals placed in a harvesting operation should exhibit their natural flight instinct.
5. The animals should be self-sufficient for forage, water and shelter.
6. Each hunt should include a guide to ensure humane harvesting.
7. Hunters will be required to possess familiarity with their weapon of choice.
8. All meat from harvested animals will be utilized in a suitable manner.
9. Proper post-mortem testing must be conducted to monitor the herd health status.

Arguments for CHPs

Here are the main arguments put forward by the supporters of the proposal:

1. Alberta farm-raised elk and deer are now being exported to the United States and Saskatchewan to hunt preserves. Keeping these animals for our hunting operations would accrue significant direct and spin-off benefits to the province, especially in rural areas.
2. CHPs would provide additional diversification and investment opportunities for farmers and the game farming industry.
3. Guides would benefit from having the option to diversify and have extended seasons, as well as increased employment opportunities.
4. Since most of the clients are expected to be from the United States and Europe, CHPs would increase tourism revenues during the traditionally slow period of autumn.
5. Public hunting will not be affected. In fact, CHPs would reduce the pressure felt by both the landowner and wildlife, and may improve traditional hunting opportunities.
6. In Alberta, paid hunting is already legal for bison, wild boar and pheasant - so why not deer and elk? Adding cervids to the approved list would enable operators to attract more clients by bundling several prime trophy animals into one hunt.
7. Some 26 states and provinces allow captive shooting operations for deer and elk. In Canada, these are Saskatchewan and Quebec. In the United States, Idaho, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York allow some sort of hunting preserves.

In New Zealand, the paid hunting industry has become a significant earner of overseas funds with substantial benefits to deer farming, the guiding and hunting fraternity, and the tourism industry. Industry earnings are estimated to be \$NZ10 million annually.

The experiences with jurisdictions that allow cervid harvesting preserves have been positive. None of the disasters purported by the opponents have materialized.

8. Hunters in Alberta deserve a choice. They should be free to choose between a public hunting or a private hunting experience, or enjoy both. Right now, Alberta hunters would have to go to Saskatchewan to experience a quality private hunt for deer or elk.

And more and more hunters are looking for a choice. There are many reasons for this:

1. *Fewer places to hunt* – public lands are being gobbled up by development and private hunting leases. More land is being posted, and many farmers and ranchers don't permit hunting on their lands (can't blame them). Hunting preserves are an alternative.

2. *Overcrowding* – with less land and more people interested in hunting, public lands near large population areas get pretty crowded during the hunting season, especially on opening day. This has negative implications for hunter safety, quality of the hunting experience and availability of quality trophy animals. Hunting preserves strictly limit the number of hunters at any one time.

3. *Short seasons* – in many areas, hunting seasons are short – from a few days to a few weeks, usually in the late fall. Unless you can get time off work, this usually means only a few weekends are available to you to go hunting. Hunting on preserves can be done from August to December, and even longer.

4. *Lack of quality animals* – it is getting increasingly difficult to bag a trophy buck in the wild. There are many reasons for this. One is that selective hunting – shooting the biggest bucks – results in a drain on the genetic pool by removing the best breeders. Bad winters and poaching also take their toll of animals. Preserves offer quality trophy animals that are raised on deer and elk farms.

5. *Time constraints* – everyone these days seems to have to work harder and longer. It is not possible for many people to spend the time scouting before hunting season, and spending days locating and tracking down that trophy animal. Many people have several weeks vacation time, and most of that better be spent with the family! Busy people who like to hunt are looking at options. Preserves offer longer seasons, and one to three days is all you usually need to harvest a trophy.

6. *Expectation of success* – people with money are usually successful in their fields of endeavor. Therefore, they expect (and require) success in their pursuit of a trophy. They are not too excited at the prospect of spending two weeks with an outfitter and not even seeing a world-class trophy. These type of people expect results! Clients of hunting preserves usually experience 100% success rate due to the availability of a large number of quality animals.

7. *More disposable income* – with the American and Canadian economies having done so well in the last decade, there is much more disposable income available. This includes people who like to hunt, and they are willing to spend some of their cash on a quality hunting experience. Many more people can now afford to hunt in a preserve.

8. *Expense* – cost of public hunting seems to be going up – everything from the cost of fees to transportation to accommodation. The cost gap between public hunting and hunting on a preserve is getting narrower.

9. *Skills* – the skills required for getting a trophy animal in the wild are considerable – you have to be in excellent physical shape and be a good shot. As with all things, this requires lots of practice,

which in turn takes time and facilities - all which most of us don't have! Preserve hunting does not require the same level of skill, and is ideal for people with physical limitations or disabilities.

10. *Safety* – as already mentioned, hunting in a crowd of people with high-powered rifles is anything but safe. Preserves limit the number of hunters at any one time.

11. *Health concerns* – trophies harvested in the wild run the risk of having diseases such as CWD or TB. Preserve animals have been tested and are known to be disease-free.

12. *Availability* – if you want to hunt a wild trophy elk, you probably have to put your name into a draw. Many people won't be drawn in their lifetime. However, many preserves can offer you a hunt for a trophy elk any time you want.

13. *Out-of-state fees and requirements* – if you want to hunt wild deer and elk in another state or province, you get dinged with hefty license fees. Also, you are usually required to use the services of an outfitter and guide. Heck, for the same money, you can experience a quality trophy hunt on a preserve with all the advantages mentioned above.

14. *Many rules and regulations* – have you looked at the rules and regulations associated with public hunting recently? It is nearly impossible to remember them all, and you constantly run the risk of inadvertently violating one of them. Yes, preserves have rules too, but things are a lot simpler.

15. *Zealous conservation officers* – most fish and game officers are a decent lot. However, there are a few who take their roles too seriously and harass hunters. I really don't like to be stopped, searched and questioned when I haven't done anything wrong. This is not an issue with preserve hunting.

16. *First Nations* – in Canada, Natives have the right to hunt big game all year round. In certain regions, this has an impact on the numbers and quality of game animals available, and on the limits and length of seasons for other hunters.

17. *Gun laws* – in Canada, with the new firearm regulations, buying and owning a gun is becoming a real hassle. Many people who hunted previously have gotten rid of their firearms to avoid registration. However, these people can still hunt on a preserve if the operators provide the rifles or bows.

Hunting on a preserve offers a quality hunting experience devoid of all the hassles and problems described above. It is no wonder that people that love to hunt are turning to hunting preserves!

Hunting in general is declining. In Alberta, the number of hunters between 1980 and 1997 dropped by 42%. The number of Alberta hunters dropped from 56,804 in 1993 to 44,188 in 1996. In Canada, the number of licensed waterfowl hunters dropped from 525,000 in 1978 to 197,000 in 1999, a drop of 62%. A lot of reasons are given for this decline - increased costs, decreased access to quality hunting areas, aging populations, increased restrictions to owning firearms (Canada), and the urbanization of populations.

Objections to CHPs

I attended the public information session held in Edmonton on July 4, 2001. The concerns expressed by some of the speakers opposed to CHPs reflect the following common themes:

1. *Land taken away from wildlife* – the concern is that the land used for fenced cervid harvest preserves will not be available for native deer and elk and other wildlife species. This is an absurd argument: Alberta has 142 million acres with 60% (85 million acres) of that being public land. Even a hundred CHPs at 600 acres each (60,000 acres) would account for less than .0004% of the land mass of Alberta. Urban expansion, logging and oil exploration activity remove much more land from wildlife habitat than CHPs ever will!

2. *Fair chase* – hunting behind wire does not constitute “fair chase.” Several of the major trophy organizations, such as Boone and Crockett, do not recognize deer or elk trophies taken on hunting preserves. However, as several speakers pointed out, fair chase varies greatly both in the wild and on hunting preserves. Many wild deer are bagged on the first day of hunting season by individuals driving the roads and fields in their trucks – hardly fair chase in my books. On the other hand, an experienced whitetail buck is almost impossible to find, let alone bag, in a few acres of bush, whether in the wild or on a hunting preserve. In this case, reality is much different than perception, and fair chase is not a valid argument against CHPs.

3. *Privatizing and commercialization of wildlife* – several organizations expressed opposition to taking and using wildlife for private commercial ventures. The harvest preserve operators do not, and never intended, to stock their preserves with deer and elk from the wild. All the animals would be obtained from licensed, regulated game farms.

Several misconceptions need to be clarified here. First, all livestock at one time or another came from the wild. Second, deer and elk were originally captured from the wild to begin the game farming industry. But the practice is strictly prohibited now, and game farmers face stiff penalties if they are caught adding wild animals to their herds. Most would not want to anyway for two major reasons: a) concern about bringing in diseases to their herds; and, b) no genetic records on the wild animals. Game farmers keep careful records to constantly improve their genetics. Most would not want to add unknown, wild genetics to their breeding program.

Over the last few years, whenever a city or county decided to shoot wild deer to reduce populations that were causing problems, we’d get e-mails suggesting these deer be captured and given to game farms. Almost unanimously, the deer farmers said they wouldn’t want these animals for the reasons stated above.

4. *Disease* – there is a concern that enclosed deer and elk are more susceptible to catching and spreading disease. A related concern is that if the diseased animals escape, they would spread it to the wild animals. Certainly, the CWD cases in Saskatchewan are behind these worries. There are disease issues with all livestock. Right now, Foot and Mouth Disease is of much greater concern than CWD, which is quite rare. Although the disease risks can never be completely eliminated, they are being managed by regular testing of game farmed animals. As well, the code of ethics suggests that all harvested animals be tested.

5. *Negative impact on public hunting* – this fear keeps coming up even though CHPs have stated that public hunting opportunities are not threatened, and in fact will be enhanced. In places such as Saskatchewan and Michigan, where hunting preserves exist, public hunting has not been impacted at all. Hunters in these jurisdictions have a better choice of the hunting experiences.

6. *It's wrong* – the animal rights organizations and some individuals strongly believe that killing of deer and elk for sport is wrong. The rights of these individuals to hold and articulate these beliefs must be respected. However, as long as hunting remains legal, the rights of individuals to pursue these activities free of harassment should also be respected. These are value conflicts, and no amount of arguments is likely to change one or the other's set of beliefs.

7. *Cost* – some expressed a concern about the amount of public funds or taxpayer dollars that would be required to support CHPs, especially if there was a disease outbreak. The Associations are not asking for any public funds to set up and operate CHPs. The costs associated with monitoring and controlling diseases are already allocated to organizations responsible for all livestock in Alberta and Canada.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis above, I cannot see any logical reason for the Government of Alberta to deny the Associations' application to legalize Cervid Hunt Preserves.

The major reasons for approving CHPs are:

1. Preserve hunting of bison, wild boar and pheasant already exists in Alberta with no significant problems or negative impact.
2. In places like Saskatchewan and Michigan, where hunting preserves have been in operation for some time, there have been no major problems (as predicted by the opponents). Rather, these jurisdictions have enjoyed significant economic benefits for operators and rural communities.
3. This will not be an issue in the next provincial election, as it does not affect the vast majority of Albertans. The strong support by rural Alberta for the Conservatives will continue if they approve changes to allow CHPs.

The opposition to harvest preserves is mostly based on beliefs that CHPS are ethically wrong. The opposition comes from people that are least likely to be affected by CHPs.

The approval of CHPs would be consistent with the philosophy and goals of the government to support private enterprise and choice, e.g., Charter schools, private clinics, privatization of liquor stores, etc. CHPs support private enterprise, encourage tourism, and give the hunting public a choice, without taking anything away from existing opportunities.

So let's quit stalling, and get on with this initiative that is in the best interests of the province. Let's approve CHPs as proposed by the Alberta Elk Association and the Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer Association, so that we can begin enjoying the benefits!

2. HANDLING OF WHITETAILS – PART IV

[By Len Jubinville of Delclayna Whitetail & Bison Co. Ltd. and *deerstore.com*]

Hello, for the fourth time. As I mentioned previously, in this article I will talk about the evolution of the Deerhandler™.

For any apparatus to evolve, the element of need and change has to be there. With Alberta's regulations, the need to restrain our deer was there right from the beginning. Because of the need to do things better and the need to keep abreast with changes within our industry, improvements to our equipment were necessary.

Attempt #1

Picture a 2' wide x 3'6" high x 4'6" long plywood box with a guillotine gate at one end and a padded hole big enough for a deer to put its head through at the other end. The end with the padded hole was cut in thirds vertically. One third was stationary, and the other two-thirds were installed in tracks top and bottom long enough to slide wide open to let a deer out, or close past the cut line. This allowed a reduction in the size of the hole, making it impossible for the deer to pull its head back. Small sliding doors were installed on one side wall to allow for inspections and injections. The floor was made of wood planking on skids running lengthwise to prevent the deer from gaining too much traction. This "hole in a box squeeze," as we called it, was placed in front of a series of tunnels, which also ended up changing considerably.

Our first tunnels were too high, too long and too narrow, which encouraged the deer to jump up and prevented them from turning around comfortably. They felt trapped in these tunnels. Today, we know it's important to keep our deer comfortable and stress-free as much as possible by allowing them to move freely till it's time to restrain them.

Like most other deer farmers at that time, we built our deer handling system outside. Upon lifting the guillotine gate on the "hole in the box squeeze," the deer in the dark tunnel would see daylight. In most cases, its head was through the hole and its shoulders against the padding immediately. They would often pull back just as fast, so if the operator of the sliding head gate wasn't on the ball, you would end up with a jack, I mean, a deer in a box.

A second chance to catch it often became an exercise in patience. Once you were successful in closing the head gate in time, the deer's first reaction was to pull back. Instantly, you would end up with a very still head, but, in most cases, a not-so-still body. Tagging was easy, but anything else was next to impossible. That's when we decided to make one sliding wall, so we could apply pressure and squeeze the deer against the other wall. That helped to keep the deer more secure. But access to the animal was still very limited and it was still only done through openings in the walls where deer legs would often poke through. For just a few animals, it was not too bad, and at least we could comply with the regulations.

As our herd grew, so did my impatience with the "hole in the box squeeze." We were extremely limited when performing different tasks on our animals, such as cutting antlers, trimming feet and undertaking general care. I remember one of my pet peeves was when you would catch a fawn, and it would often immediately sit down. The first thing you need to do is determine its sex. At Delclayna we install the large dangle tag in the left ear for males and in the right ear for females. If you can't confirm that a fawn has buttons, proving it's a male, you need to check under the tail. If

the deer is sitting down and covering the evidence, what do you do? Our policy has been the same since the beginning. If you cannot guarantee that it's a male from the head, you have to check the other end. That meant that with the "hole in the box squeeze," you would have to skid it ahead to be able to access the back. You would then lift the deer's behind, hoping you could see proof before you got kicked. Today we are proud to say we have never registered the wrong sex of an animal.

Another pet peeve for us was that you ended up working in a crouched position most of the time. Can you imagine having to TB test 500 deer with the "hole in the box squeeze"? As much as I was getting to hate that box, there was one aspect that was pretty handy for us at the beginning. If you wanted to relocate a deer to a certain pen, you would just hook up the quad to the back of the box and skid both of them to the pasture, release the deer, and come back full-speed with the little, ugly, good-for-nothing "hole in the box squeeze." Are you detecting residual frustration and anger here? How times have changed! Can you picture us doing this today? One good thing about our "hole in the box squeeze" is that it made me really mad, which motivated me to do something about the situation.

Attempt #2

Our second attempt was a cross between a cattle chute, the "hole in the box chute" and a rotunda. This apparatus turned out to be no better than the "hole in the box squeeze." The only advantage was that we could bring in bucks with antlers, and with some wrestling, we managed to cut the antlers off if needed. Maybe another time I could tell you stories about this, too.

The one thing it had in common with our first handler was that we were still trying to handle our deer with their feet on the ground. If you study how the back leg of a deer is constructed, you will find that it has an extra bone with another joint to give them more jumping power. This unique design gives them more leverage: for their size, deer possess the most hind leg strength of any animal in the world. If there is one thing this no-name squeeze did right, it was to convince me that I should look at ways to handle these animals with their feet off the ground. After some research, I discovered that the most popular way to handle deer in New Zealand was with a drop floor cradle that kept the deer's feet off the ground and held them up at a level that allowed people to work standing straight. Back to the drawing board, this time working with a different concept in mind.

Attempt #3

The first prototype drop floor chute was built and tested. Picture our very first old blue model with no curtains, no shoulder pads, no backpress, no roof and only a sliding gate at the front. The first deer entered the chute nicely by just walking in, so we tripped the floor and opened the front slider to grab the head. Before we could do that, it wiggled its way out, but we still liked what we saw. Deer number two did the same thing. Deer number three shot for the roof and when it came down, we tripped the floor. This one we handled from one side of the chute, with the front slider closed. It was easy enough to hold it down, but we didn't like the way its neck was bent and its head pressed against the front sliding gate. Before handling number four, we covered the top of the chute with plywood. No more rockets; so we finished handling the other 20 or so deer with the front slider closed.

To the drawing board once more. This time, it was not to change the concept, but to make improvements upon it. Now convinced that keeping the deer off their feet was the way to go, we decided to give our invention a name by trademarking it the "Deerhandler™." Convinced that a drop floor would prove to be the fastest, safest and most efficient way to take the footing away from under a deer's feet, we made the decision to keep that concept.

Our first improvement was to remove the front slider and install shoulder pads to serve as body stops, preventing the deer from wiggling their way out. Then we went back to handle more deer and test our new idea. Again, we were very encouraged by our first trials. The shoulder pads solved the problem, and today they're a very important component of the Deerhandler™. A few deer jumped right over and straight through the Deerhandler™, so we added the vinyl curtains that hang down from the top to the shoulder pads. This solved most of the problems with deer jumping through. The more deer we handled, the better we became at it. Our confidence was also increasing. It got to a point that it was fairly common to process 25 to 30 deer per hour without missing one.

With a few things still bugging us, like the noise, and having to press down on the deer's back to hold it still, we set out to make more improvements. First we decided to deal with the noise. The deer hitting the side walls of the cradle with its hooves generated most of the noise. The Deerhandler™ at the time was constructed entirely out of metal, which made the noise worse. It didn't bother the deer much, but it was somewhat annoying for the people handling the deer. Our solution was to spray a thick coating of urethane insulation on the outside of the Deerhandler™. The reduction in noise was very significant, and from then on we sprayed every unit we manufactured.

Still not happy with having to hold the deer down manually, we decided to do something about that. When discussing this problem with some of our customers, most agreed that a device installed to hold the bigger animals would be a real asset. Within a few days, we had a device designed and installed, which we called a backpress. All this was happening in the fall, at a time when we usually handle lots of deer. Anxious to try out our new backpress, we picked a day when we had to run one hundred and four bucks through to cut antlers, wash tags, deworm and sort. Test trials of new or improved equipment were becoming routine at our farm. With the first buck in the blue Deerhandler™ by 9:00 am, we were all anxious to see how our new backpress would work. Well, it was unbelievable! Once that backpress was clamped down on that deer's back, it didn't move a bit. On a roll, and totally impressed at how easily and smoothly things were going, we were sure our problems were solved.

Well, sometimes things are just too good to be true. All of a sudden, around the fifteenth deer, one leaves the Deerhandler™ with a busted back leg. This was something we had never seen before. Trying to figure out what went wrong was very difficult. Had it been broken in the tunnels, or the crowding pen? The break was at the knee on the left back leg; the joint had been dislocated, and the bone had punctured through the skin on the inside of the leg. Stumped for answers as to what could have happened, we decided to continue. Everything was going very smoothly once again.

All of a sudden, after processing another 20 or so deer, we noticed another broken back leg. The injury was exactly the same, except that this time it was on the right leg. Convinced that this deer had been injured in the Deerhandler™, or when leaving the Deerhandler™, we started thinking about what had changed, or what we were doing differently from before. These injuries were something we had never experienced before in all the years we had been handling deer. The thinking caps went on and a process of elimination took place. We came to the conclusion that our problem was probably the new wooden floor upon which we were working. Until now, we had always handled our deer right on the ground. All agreeing that it was probably the floor, we decided to delay handling in order to install some rubber matting.

A couple of hours later, we were back handling deer, and we really liked how much more smoothly the deer were leaving the Deerhandler™. Enjoying our new backpress and our new floor, again we thought for sure our problems were solved. Just when we were all so confident and nearly finished handling, one more buck leaves the Deerhandler™ with a broken left hind leg. We could tell that this injury was identical to the other two. Again, we were stumped for answers, refusing to relate the problem to our new backpress because it was working so well. We decided to blame it on bad luck, or lack of minerals, and resumed handling our animals until all one hundred and four were done. With three injured deer out of one hundred and four, we were all very disappointed. On the other hand, we were all impressed with how our new backpress had performed.

I spent the next forty-eight hours trying to come up with some answers. It was hard to admit, but once I explained my theory to my partners, they all agreed that our problem was probably the backpress. As I mentioned previously, this was all happening in the fall when there's always lots of deer to handle, so we decided that when it was time to handle more deer, we would not use the backpress. Sure enough, after handling the next group of seventy-some deer without using the backpress and experiencing no injuries, we knew we had finally identified our culprit. This wasn't very good news for us because we wanted to introduce the backpress as an improvement to our Deerhandler™. Refusing to let go of the idea of our backpress, I started dissecting the whole design of the Deerhandler™.

The theory behind my thinking went back to how a deer's leg is constructed. Picture a deer cradled in a "V" with a solid vertical wall on each side of his legs approximately four inches apart, like the old blue model Deerhandler™. When a deer is suspended like that, its back legs want to cross. When you apply pressure on the deer's back that has no leniency at all, and with a deer's strong back legs, it can pop that joint as it exerts pressure to try and straighten its legs when attempting to jump. The problem had never occurred before when everyone was holding their deer down manually: with that method, there was always enough give. Therefore, if anyone is thinking of installing a backpress on our old blue model Deerhandler™, or any cradle with a similar design, I would recommend that it be a mechanism that has some give to it so you can adjust the pressure. By then, I could tell that I was headed for many more sleepless nights.

Attempt #4

Giving up on the idea of developing a backpress that would yield under pressure, we started our thinking with a solid backpress. From there we deleted the walls under the cradle that were holding the narrow, one-plank floor, which were partly responsible for the injuries. We then designed a different floor that spanned the full width of the Deerhandler™, and covered it with rubber matting. This permitted a portion of the floor to be hinged and raised vertically to serve as a kick wall. This also let us make room for a palpation door on one side, big enough for a person to enter the Deerhandler™ right behind the animal, yet safe behind our new kick wall. Finally, a rough prototype was built incorporating these new ideas.

Another trial run at handling deer with a new and very different drop floor chute proved to be very encouraging. Not only did it solve the problem of back leg injuries, it also solved our noise problem. With the nice wide rubber matted floor upon which the deer had to leave the chute, and with all the other features that this design would offer, we decided to start production of our new Deerhandler™. The most recent improvement, introduced last year, was our automatic head gate, which has been received very well. Our next improvement will be to design a mechanism operated by an electric eye that can trip the floor at the right time. This, we hope, will be sold as a kit that can be installed on all existing Deerhandlers™; in other words, "The Green Machines."

Today, our 2001 model Deerhandler™ is the most advanced deer cradle, squeeze, crush (for my American friends), chute, or whatever you want to call it, in the world. With our new modular tunnel system and our many different portable deer handling products all designed for compact shipping and ease of assembly, a customer anywhere in the world could be handling deer within two hours of receiving an order. On the drawing board now is an “Extra Large Deerhandler™” that will handle deer of all sizes, from fallow deer to elk, without hydraulics.

Here at Delclayna, we are always looking for ways to improve the lives of deer farmers and their animals. Our dedication is exemplified through the semen collection research in which we have been involved. We recently held a semen collecting experiment without anesthesia on our farm, and the Deerhandler™ restrained the bucks so all technicians could easily access them where required. The above experiment is making history, and will prove to be the most efficient and safest way to collect semen.

I trust you have enjoyed the Deerhandler™ story. I would also like to say thank you to all our customers, because without you guys and your understanding, none of this would have been possible. I also want to say thank you to my partners and staff for their contributions, their patience and for never giving up on me.

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3. ALBERTA WAPITI PRODUCTS CO-OP

[By Cindy Ewashkiw, Office Manager at AWAPCO.]

The Alberta Wapiti Products Co-op (AWAPCO) was officially incorporated in the province of Alberta, Canada on June 22, 2001. The membership drive formally ended on July 3, 2001. Some 138 people joined and invested over \$200,000 in this “new-gen” co-op. History is about to be made with the first Canadian commercial marketing of elk (wapiti) meat by a co-operative.

In early August, the first 30 elk will be on their way to Bouvry Exports Calgary Ltd, at Fort Macleod, Alberta. A small quantity of animals will serve as a test run to work out the logistics of travel and processing, to establish red meat yield data, and to begin the development of meat cut specifications. Once this task has been completed, the first large run of 150–200 bulls is set for the end of August. AWAPCO is very much aware of the excessive distance to the processing plant, and will be making a concerted effort to co-ordinate animal transport.

Sales of premium cuts from the elk carcasses will be destined for high-end or “white tablecloth” restaurants. It is expected that 25% to 30% of the meat will fit into this category, and include cuts such as tenderloin, rib eye, strip loin, and top sirloin. The other 70% - 75% are end cuts and trim. Sales opportunities for these cuts are makers of sausage, and value-added cuts for the food service industry. AWAPCO plans to make Alberta elk meat available to Canadian distributors, US meat processors and European retail and food service distributors.

AWAPCO plans to develop a new high-quality elk meat program that will focus on the following market opportunities:

1. Building a Canadian, US, and European client base to maximize returns to producers.
2. Gathering red meat yield data and establishing a database of information about carcass values. This will allow us to develop our own elk meat specifications to best meet the needs of customers in North America and Europe.
3. Establishing a grading system (internationally compatible) to ensure consistency of meat quality and to provide a basis for producer payments.
4. Creating long-term alliances with North American specialty meat distributors and European exporters.

All Co-op members that supply elk to the Cooperative must comply with these contract requirements:

1. Elk must be between 2–3 years of age.
2. All elk must be raised naturally, free of hormones and steroids, on fresh open pasture.
3. All elk must be fed with feed that does not contain protein supplements (meat and bone meal) nor is derived from rendered animals, and must be free of same upon delivery.
4. Upon delivery, and prior to acceptance by the Cooperative, an age verification certificate must be provided for the elk that are delivered.

Alberta government regulations require producers obtain a transport permit from the local CFIA vet before shipping animals. Also, antlers must be removed from the elk before shipping.

Please feel free to call the AWAPCO office anytime if you have questions or concerns. The phone number is 780-980-7589.

4. LIVE ANIMAL TEST FOR PRIONS

The Globe and Mail (July 3, 2001) reports that Israeli researchers have developed a simple urine test that can identify so-called mad cow disease before symptoms appear. This finding could prevent large-scale culling of unaffected cattle and lead to screening tests for the human variant of the brain-wasting disease.

Prions - the nerve proteins that cause BSE, CJD or related diseases such as scrapie and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) - are normally benign, but can take on a misshapen form that can cause holes to form in the brain.

Until now, the only definitive way to test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, commonly known as mad cow disease) - or for the variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, known as vCJD, that humans can catch - has been to examine the brain after death.

Researchers developed a urine test that can identify the nerve protein particle, or prion, that causes the fatal disease before any signs of the illness appear.

"The goal and hope is to develop a test that could be widely used for the detection of the disease," said Ruth Gabizon, head of the research team at Jerusalem's Hadassah University Hospital.

"This could avert the necessity of killing herds of cattle upon the discovery of one affected animal."

Urine samples from hamsters, cattle and humans known to be infected all revealed the presence of prions before any clinical signs manifested, said the researchers, whose work is reported in the current issue of the Journal of Biological Chemistry.

The researchers said examination of human urine could also prevent the danger of infection via blood donations, although so far no direct link has been established between blood or organ donations and the transmission of vCJD.

Widespread urine tests among humans could also help determine whether the number of carriers is in the hundreds, the thousands, or even the hundreds of thousands, as some scientists fear.

"Regular screening of cattle may be able to wipe out BSE in animals within a few years, but from data available so far it appears that the incubation period of CJD in humans is about 30 years," said Dr. Gabizon, adding: "That's why it is so important to screen all blood and organ donors, because it can lie dormant for so long."

Dr. Gabizon said talks are underway with commercial investors in the United States and Europe to develop a simple version of the urine test so that all cattle and human patients, including potential blood and organ donors, could be screened as a matter of course.

Dr. Gabizon has been researching prions at Hadassah Hospital since 1988. Previously, she studied prion disease with Nobel Prize-winning scientist Stanley Prusiner at the University of California.

[Obviously these research findings have a tremendous significance in detecting and eliminating CWD in cervids. Let's hope our industry and veterinary researchers move quickly to valid the effectiveness of these tests on CWD in deer and elk. Ed.]

5. NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATIONS

Barbara Ramey Fox has resigned as Executive Director of the North American Deer Farmers Association (NADeFA). Barb was always very helpful and supportive to Deerfarmer.com, and we wish her the very best success in her future endeavors. A search is underway to find her replacement. If you know of anyone suitable, please contact the NADeFA office at info@nadefa.org.

6. EVENTS CALENDAR

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

MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION summer meeting will be held on July 20, 2001 at the Fargo Radison, Fargo, North Dakota in conjunction with the North Central Antler Competition. For more information contact Brenda at bhartkopf@cmgate.com or phone 320-543-3664.

ALBERTA ELK EXPO will be held in Drayton Valley, Alberta on July 27 and 28. There will be a trade show, antler competition, new producer seminar and live animal demonstration. Free admission. For more information contact info@albertaelk.com or phone Mike at 403-346-9401.

NORTH AMERICAN ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION International Antler Competition will be held on August 4-5, 2001 in Pueblo, Colorado. For more information contact info@naelk.org or phone 816-431-3605.

ONTARIO WHITE TAIL DEER PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION Annual Meeting and BBQ will be held on August 12, 2001 at the Walkers' in Ballinafad, Ontario. For more information, contact Mabel Dougherty, President at 519-752-1322.

TEXAS DEER ASSOCIATION 2001 Convention will be held Sept. 7th to 9th, 2001 at the Omni San Antonio Hotel, San Antonio, Texas USA. For more information or to register, contact TDA at 877-912-3337, or e-mail info@texasdeerassociation.com or visit their website at <http://www.texasdeerassociation.com>.

CHEMICAL IMMOBILIZATION AND ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION SEMINAR sponsored by Safe-Capture International will be held on Sept. 8 and 9, 2001 in Merrill, Wisconsin at the Buckstop Deer Farm. For more information contact Safe-Capture International at 608-767-3071 or safecaptur@aol.com.

REINDEER OWNER'S AND BREEDER'S ASSOCIATION will hold their East Regional meeting on November 10-11, 2001 in Gloversville, NY USA. For more information phone Pat at 518-661-5038 or 515-661-7640 evenings.

MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION Annual Conference will be held on Jan 12, 2002 at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center, Willmar, MN USA. For more information contact Brenda at phone 320-543-3664 or bhartkopf@cmgate.com.

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, e-mail 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 (as a post-conference workshop held in conjunction with the World Deer Congress). For more information and/or to register, contact Safe-Capture

International at safecaptur@aol.com, 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 e-mail gpoest@novagate.com.

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 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 info@naelk.org or phone 816-431-3605.

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. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

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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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