

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

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1. NADEFA CONFERENCE REPORT

I just came back from attending (and presenting at) my first North American Deer Farmers Association (NADeFA) Conference that was held in Oklahoma City, USA. I was impressed with the quality and range of sessions. All the presentations I attended were well-done and provided useful information and tips. A copy of my presentation - Internet Marketing of Your Deer Farm - is available in its entirety (all 45 pages) in the Deerfarmer.com Library at <http://deerfarmer.com/library/internet.htm>

My congratulations to Jo Ann Logan and her committee for a job well done. I have organized large conferences and smaller workshops myself and know how much work and effort it takes. Not only did Jo Ann do a phenomenal job in organizing the conference, but she and her husband Jerry were exceptional hosts in entertaining many guests at their beautiful Honey Hill Farm on Saturday morning. I had a chance to meet many people and talk about deer farming around the world.

Here are some things I picked up at the conference about challenges facing the deer farming industry:

1. *So much to do, so few to do it.* NADeFA, like most other industry associations, is a volunteer-based organization. Volunteers serve on the Board and on various committees. Because NADeFA is a national (international) association, it is difficult and expensive for people to get together and get things done. People can only take so much time from their jobs and other commitments to be able to contribute. Yet NADeFA and similar associations are critical in

protecting the interests of the deer farming industry. Informing and lobbying state and federal governments, and having a say in regulations being developed, is a very important role.

Solutions?? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. I suggest that associations try to make it attractive for more people to volunteer, and try and remove as many obstacles to participating as possible. The most effective associations I have worked with tend to have adequate resources to hire/contract out much of the essential work. Things usually get done when someone is assigned the responsibility and gets paid for it. This route would require NADeFA to expand its membership, and obtain additional financial resources.

2. *Lack of sharing causes repetition of mistakes.* The deer industry (and deer farmers) in most states and provinces face similar problems regarding regulations and laws. However, it seems that each group is on its own and there is no access to common resources or expertise. For the benefit of the entire industry, it would be useful if “someone” identified and/or developed a “knowledge database,” resources, training materials, experts and contacts to help these groups. Again, the challenge is time and money, as identified above.

3. *Balkanization and inter-state/province barriers.* Canada and the United States remind me of Europe a long, long time ago with its many separate kingdoms. Instead of kings and queens ruling each kingdom, we have governors and premiers. Each province and state has its own laws regarding the raising of deer, health regulations and transportation. This balkanization makes it difficult and more costly to buy/sell and move deer. Someone needs to lobby the federal governments in both countries to “harmonize” the regulations and remove barriers to cross-border trade so that deer farmers can get on with their business for the benefit of both nations.

2. NUTRITION FOR FARMED DEER

Of all the questions we get at Deerfarmer.com, those regarding nutrition and feed rank near the top. Here is some information on nutrition presented at the NADeFA conference by Dr. Ron Randel and Dr. Gerald Evers from the Texas Agricultural Experimental Station.

Deer have smaller rumens and shorter digestive tracts relative to their body weight than either sheep or cattle. This means that deer require feed that has better digestibility. There are differences among various deer species. White-tailed deer need the highest digestibility, while fallow, axis, sika and red deer can perform well on diets with lower digestibility. Elk can utilize even more roughage and grasses. None of the deer species are true grazers such as cattle and sheep.

PROTEIN: Protein requirements vary with age, lactation status, pregnancy and stage of the antler growth cycle. Weaned fawns require about 13-20% crude protein in their diets. Males will require from 16-18% when growing velvet antlers. For mixed sexes and ages of deer, a 15% crude protein diet will assure reasonably good performance of the deer herd. If deer are grouped by age and sex, then weaned fawns should receive about 18% protein for maximum growth. Lactating does and bucks developing antlers should receive about 16% protein. Non-lactating does and bucks before and after antler development can be maintained on diets containing 12-14% protein.

FIBRE: Since deer are ruminants (cud-chewers), they can digest fibre from plants (cellulose). The forages consumed contain varying amounts of soluble carbohydrate (starch) and a lot of fibre. Fibre is required to keep the rumen healthy. Deer need fibre, as a complete concentrate diet will make them sick. Deer can have toxic acidosis if they are fed too much grain or high starch feed. They need from 13 to 15% fibre in their diet to stay healthy.

MINERALS: Calcium and phosphorus are required for bone and antler growth and for lactation. The exact requirements for calcium, phosphorus, salt and trace elements are not currently known. However, deer will perform well on mineral mixes designed for sheep and goats in your region of the country.

Seasonality of deer species is a problem for the deer farmer. Most deer species have suppressed food intake during the winter months. Therefore, it is important that the animals, particularly males, acquire adequate fat reserves during the spring and summer. Feed intake in deer ranges from 2.5% up to 5% of their body weight depending on age, weight and time of year.

3. WHITETAIL DOE HAS 34 FAWNS

By Harold Kriesche from the Deer Ranch at info@deerranch.com

Elizabeth, a whitetail doe, was born in June 1977. She lives with 24 other whitetails at the Deer Ranch in northern Michigan USA. The Deer Ranch started in 1950 as a gift shop. Then someone dropped off two orphan fawns. That started a roadside whitetail exhibit that continues until today.

According to our state Department of Natural Resources, Elizabeth, now 22 years of age, is the oldest deer in Michigan. DNR aged a doe that was shot in November of 1967 to be 19.5 years old. Also, DNR stated the oldest they have known a doe to give birth was at 13 years of age. Elizabeth has broken all those records, certainly in Michigan and perhaps in other states.

In July of 1997, Elizabeth lost a fawn due to a lack of clostrum in her milk. Due to her age, we decided to use Latalyse to prevent her from having any more fawns. Latalyse has worked well on fawns that we left with bucks during the breeding season. Things looked good for Elizabeth the next spring, except she was gaining weight. In our 5 pens we noticed that does pace the fence about a day before giving birth. Elizabeth was pacing along with the does in the other pens. We thought they were just copying each other.

The next morning I arrived early to spend the day watching the does give birth. By now I was thinking that Elizabeth must be pregnant. Sure enough, when I went for coffee and came back, she had twins (at 22 years of age!). These were fawns number 33 and 34 for Elizabeth.

Since I had flunked birth control class with Elizabeth, I decided to let nature take her course this year. Maybe the buck in with her is the one that outsmarted us last year. We are looking forward to this spring to see whether Elizabeth can hit the three dozen mark.

I would like to hear from deer farmers about any old (and still productive) deer out there.

4. DEER PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

Once upon a time, a long time ago, I was a professional photographer. Yes, I took the photography courses, worked in the darkroom and owned a photography studio in Toronto. I did weddings, passports, commercial photography and all the other things photographers do.

Against this background, it is understandable that I get pretty frustrated with the poor quality of deer photos people send me and want me to put up on Deerfarmer.com or on their website. Deer, and especially whitetail and mule deer, are among the most beautiful of nature's animals. All people love looking at photographs of deer. (It is the third most popular section on Deerfarmer.com, after Classifieds and Discussion Forum). Also, a good quality picture of a deer will help you sell its offspring or semen.

So here are some suggestions to help you get the best pictures possible of your deer.

1. *Use the right equipment.* Any name brand 35mm SLR camera will work fine. The key is to ensure the camera has a quality lens that will provide sharp, clear and vivid images. Avoid the cheap "instamatic" cameras, as the quality of their images is not very good. I have received some pretty good photographs taken by the new digital cameras. However, overall, that technology is still not at a stage where it compares to 35mm camera.

2. *Get the light right.* The best environment to take a picture of a deer is on a slightly overcast day. Bright sunlight creates too much contrast and shadows. Pictures taken in the late evening when it is getting dark don't come out too well. Flash doesn't work well unless you have several units (as in a studio) to get rid of the shadows. Today's films are pretty forgiving but it is important to get the right exposure. I personally don't like the automatic cameras because they rarely get the light right. I prefer to set the shutter speed and exposure manually. Don't be afraid to bracket - take one picture at what you believe to be the best exposure, then take another picture at 1 f-stop above and 1 f-stop below. It is nearly impossible to get the proper exposure when photographing in winter. The white snow creates havoc with exposure. Stick to spring, summer and fall to take your pictures. (Besides, what is there to photograph in deer in the winter?)

3. *Choose the right angle.* Take a look of the photographs taken of other livestock. It usually is a side shot showing the whole body. Yes, antlers are the exciting and most interesting part of a deer, but buyers will want to see the rest of the deer as well. If you are photographing deer in your fields or pens, try and get as close as you can, or use a telephoto lens. I can't do much with a picture of a tiny deer in a great big field. If I enlarge it, I lose the quality. Try and get a clean background. Don't photograph a big buck in a pile of trees where his antlers blend with the background. Ugly fences don't make good backgrounds either. A good tip is to kneel or lay down and shoot upward so that the sky forms the background. Yes, I can electronically remove the background, but it is a lot of work.

4. *Focus.* I want to make two key points here. First, I get many fuzzy pictures where someone did not focus the camera properly. Again, I don't like the automatic focus cameras because they may be focusing on something other than the deer. Focus on the part of the deer nearest to you. The other issue is "depth of field." With a 35mm SLR you can control the depth of field or region that is in focus. You should have a depth of field sufficient so that all the deer is in focus. Often I get pictures with the nose in focus, and the rest blurry. Knowing about the depth of field

also allows you to deliberately blur the background. It is a great strategy to remove unwanted backgrounds. Setting your f-stop at f5.6 or f8 usually gives you adequate depth of field while blurring out the background. Anything higher (e.g., f11 or f16) will put the entire picture in focus (useful if you are photographing a whole herd of deer for example). Better cameras have a preview button for depth of field. Use it to select the best settings for the picture you want. Of course, the higher the f-stop, the lower the shutter speed. Try and keep your shutter speed above 1/60 of a second to avoid blurring due to movement.

5. Scan and save in the right format. With the Internet, photographs are scanned, posted and displayed electronically. I find that a good quality photograph is a joy to scan. Even though many tools are available for enhancing scanned images, there is only so much you can do with a poor quality original. If you are scanning for use on the Internet, you should scan at a resolution of 72 to 100 dpi. Higher resolutions won't be noticeable on most computer monitors anyway, and it will keep the file size down. When you scan, be sure to export the file to a *.jpg format. This is the standard for photographs on the Internet. Also, if you are sending anyone a photo attached to an e-mail, use this format. Any other format results in a huge file size and takes forever to send.

If all this sounds too complicated for you, hire a professional photographer. You need quality deer photographs for your brochures, catalogues, displays and websites if your marketing efforts are to be successful.

5. SELLING VENISON TO CHEFS

Until our deer herds increase significantly, venison marketing will have to be carried out by individual deer farmers or groups of deer farmers. Venison is a premium product and will do best if targeted at the high-end restaurant market.

At the NADeFA conference, chef Kurt Fleischfresser gave the following practical tips for marketing venison to restaurants.

1. Cost is a major consideration for most chefs. The cost of the centre of the plate (e.g. venison) represents 25% of the cost of the final serving. The critical factor is how many portions the chef can get from the meat you sell him. They will use every part to make other food items, e.g., stock, pate, etc.
2. The trend in restaurants today is to use local ingredients. Therefore focus on your local or regional markets first. It is also easier to get to know the chefs and their unique needs locally.
3. Have the product with you when trying to sell to new chefs. Give them a sample. Also bring peripheral products to leave with them (jerky) to promote your company.
4. Call or visit chefs at non-peak times - 9 to 11 am and 2 to 4:30 pm. Don't be afraid to call for reorders. Chefs are busy and don't always have time to call you.
5. Venison is seen by most chefs as a seasonal product that is most appropriate in the fall and winter. Also, chefs will have greater success selling venison if it is treated as a special rather than a regular menu item.

6. Help new chefs with cooking suggestions. Venison is very lean. It has to be cooked over very high heat for a very short time. This shears in the juices. Since venison is so lean, adding bacon or olive oil to ground venison works well. Venison goes well with dried fruit and all wines. (If it is sold as a special, be sure to have the waiters recommend a special wine).

7. Another suggestion for promoting venison is to hold venison cooking competitions with chefs. Have local media food critics act as judges. Hold a cooking contest for the best venison recipe. Cooking classes are also a great promotional tool.

Of course, as a deer farmer, you will work very hard to provide venison of the highest and most consistent quality you can produce. If you do, your customers will keep coming back, ensuring venison sales for years to come.

6. EVENTS CALENDAR

Over the next few months, there will be several conferences, workshops and meetings held that will be of interest to experienced as well as to aspiring deer farmers. If possible, make a point of attending. You will not only learn a lot, but will make important contacts, and will have a lot of fun as well.

Here is our calendar:

SASK. WHITE-TAIL AND MULE DEER PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION. March 17-18 at the Delta Hotel in Regina Sask. Contact Lisa Schill at (306) 334-2202 or visit <http://www.saskdeer.com>

ALBERTA WHITE-TAIL AND MULE DEER ASSOCIATION CONVENTION. April 1-2 at the Capri Centre in Red Deer Alberta. For more information, visit <http://www.albertadeer.com> or phone (780) 672-5978.

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

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

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

7. NEW AT DEERFARMER.COM

I have set up a new website - Deerfarmer.net - The Deer Farmers Network - to complement Deerfarmer.com. Deerfarmer.net will host websites for individual deer farms that we have set up. Deerfarmer.com was getting too crowded and difficult to manage with all these individual farm webs.

Visit the two newest members of Deerfarmer.net - DSK Ranch in Oklahoma (<http://deerfarmer.net/DSKRanch>) and Extreme Whitetail Genetics (<http://deerfarmer.net/Extreme>). In my opinion, the DSK Ranch site is an excellent example of how a deer farm website should be set up. This site has ALL the information you need to buy deer or get the services you need. Extreme also offers you a choice of semen from some of the very best whitetail bucks in western Canada.

Our chat session has been going on pretty regularly every Wednesday night at 7:30 MDT. If you want a chance to talk about deer farming, ask some questions, or get some free advice, please join us. (Set your alarm if you keep forgetting).

8. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

We respect your right to privacy. If you wish to be removed from our mailing list at any time, simply send an e-mail to editor@deerfarmer.com with REMOVE in the Subject line.

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

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

9. CONTACT INFORMATION

We are always looking for articles and news about deer farming that we can print in this newsletter. To suggest or submit articles, contact the editor as per below.

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

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