

Welcome to the MAY 2002 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 2,800 readers in 28 countries.

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MORE ON MARKETING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Cindy Ewashkiw, co-author of *Velvet Antler, A Gift from Nature* wrote to say that EVA may help with infertility problems. She was recently approached by two women who were having difficulty getting pregnant – one had been trying for five years. After taking velvet antler for 30 days, both women became pregnant. It could be just a coincidence, but the implications are certainly intriguing.

I have had several requests regarding more information about the “catch and release” approach to hunting preserves. I only know that they do exist in the United States. If you can provide any more details on how they work or experiences with them, please contact me so I can pass the information on. *Ed.*

1. VELVET ANTLER PROTECTS THE LIVER

A University of Saskatchewan professor of physiology has found scientific evidence that elk velvet antler (EVA) may protect the liver from disease. Dr. Susan Hemmings, who has established a research program committed to assessing the impact of nutraceuticals on the liver, is a professor in the Department of Physiology at the College of Medicine. Her interest in, and work with elk velvet antler, was prompted by a curiosity that extends to all aspects of her life.

“Three years ago, I was at a mini trade show in our community, and stopped at a booth where elk velvet antler was being promoted,” she explains. “First, they corrected my misunderstanding of the velvet antler. I thought it was the velvet on the outside of the elk antler, but I learned it is the inner core of the antler harvested during the velvet stage. I was interested 100%.”

The composition of the antler core intrigued her. At the velvet stage, it has not ossified into bone, but is a gelatinous material that is highly vascular and full of nutrients, including growth factors. She could visualize it as an effective nutraceutical and wanted to test it on the liver.

The liver is essential to life and performs a myriad of functions. It is involved in the processing of the food we eat and keeping the levels of nutrients constant in the body. It produces proteins essential for clotting of the blood, immunoglobulins needed for immunity. It protects the body by selectively filtering the blood removing harmful viruses, bacteria and foreign materials. It is critically involved in detoxification and removal of harmful chemicals that enter the body. But the liver is sensitive to being damaged and damage is involved in the development of liver disease.

There are over 100 different forms of liver disease. Presently liver disease affects one in 12 Canadians and is the fourth leading cause of death, according to the Canadian Liver Foundation. It is increasing and there are no effective treatments.

“The only real treatment we have is transplantation. While we are learning a great deal about this, and have made many strides, there will never be enough livers to go around,” Hemmings said.

Because the liver is so easily damaged, Hemmings’ first concern was the toxicity of elk velvet antler. Her research, however, detected no signs of any negative effects on the growth, behavior or health of the animals and no evidence of any toxic effect on the liver. This extends other studies done by such researchers as Dr. Jeong Sim, a scientist at the University of Alberta. Her studies were carried out in adults as well as animals that has consumed velvet antler from before birth until adulthood. Further, she addressed the specific question of liver toxicity. She said lack of toxicity was an important first step before antler would be accepted as a medicine.

When the liver is in good health, one particular enzyme, gamma-glutamyltranspeptidase, or GGT, is found in lower amounts in the liver. But the enzyme’s levels are elevated in liver disease.

“We found that the rats that were fed with antler velvet in their rat chow had a decrease in GGT (compared with control group rats). We felt that the antler velvet was providing some protection for the liver,” she said.

Next, Hemmings treated rats with the powerful liver damaging chemical carbon tetrachloride to induce a moderate level of liver damage. They were tested for another enzyme, transaminase. This enzyme is present inside the healthy liver cell. It is released from the liver into the blood-stream if

serious liver damage has occurred. The animals that had been fed the antler velvet showed a 300% drop in transaminase levels compared to the control group.

“We now know the antler is having a protective effect. We need to know more. I need to study this further,” she said. For example, further research is needed to determine whether elk velvet antler will facilitate healing of damaged livers as well as protecting them from disease. There is some other research that suggests EVA promotes tissue healing. Hemmings is particularly interested in assessing the benefits of EVA in various liver diseases such as hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Hemmings’ initial research was self-funded. Recently she has received a \$10,000 (USD) grant from the Elk Research Council of the North American Elk Breeders Association.

Dr. Hemmings would ideally like to have \$80,000 (USD) over the next two years to complete a comprehensive series of studies on elk velvet. She has applied for government funding to support her research program. However, success with governments is predicated on evidence of industry’s strong financial support for her research.

One of the many benefits that Hemmings sees from being able to complete additional research studies is to legitimize EVA as a nutraceutical and potential medicine. She said that her colleagues and traditional funding foundations currently view elk velvet as akin to “snake oil.” Positive results from her work will attract additional resources and funding for more research into the health benefits of this product.

I believe this type of research is essential for the elk industry to develop profitable markets for EVA in North America. Dr. Hemmings is committed to doing her part, so let’s do ours. For more information, or if you or your association wishes to make a financial contribution to support this research, please contact:

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2. RESPONSES TO MEDIA ARTICLES

Deer and elk farmers have been dismayed about all the negative media coverage our industry has been getting lately. Here are two rebuttals written by very knowledgeable people. Use these “facts” and examples to respond to misleading articles in your local media.

[Response by Dr. James C. Kroll, Director, Institute for White-tailed Deer Management & Research (Texas) to Andy Hansroth, Outdoor Writer, Sunday Gazette-Mail, regarding an article on Chronic Wasting Disease.]

I was forwarded a copy of your article on CWD published 31 March, 2002 and read it with interest. Apparently, you have – as many outdoor columnists have done – written an article based on press releases and comments from state DNR experts. There were, however, some important points left out of your article and I would like to make them clear.

First of all, CWD is indeed a serious and mysterious disease among deer. Its origin is not totally clear, but we do know it was first observed in the Colorado State Research pens in 1967. Little action was taken for some time, and animals were allowed to leave the area during this time. Some argue the disease was present in the wild all along, but no one knows for sure. We think the disease is caused by an aberrant protein called a prion, yet that is not totally confirmed at this time. It does have the same symptoms as some of the other prion diseases such as “mad cow” (BSE) and human forms (K-J and Kuru).

Recently, research in England appears to show a link between mad cow disease and use of organophosphate pesticides by English farmers. This link may even go back to testing of these compounds for chemical warfare by the Germans. This has not been proven, but illustrates how little we know about these diseases.

A battle has been raging around the country for some time now concerning intensive management of white-tailed deer. Many in the wildlife management profession view the increased interest in managing deer on private lands as a threat to the old order and to their power. Activities such as supplemental feeding, food plots and protecting young bucks have come increasingly under fire from irate biologists. It is a philosophical battle, with combatants using whatever means they can to support their positions. As a scientist, I view one side effect of this “war” as very unfortunate. I am deeply concerned about ethical issues coming to the forefront.

Scientists are supposed to be unbiased and ethical people. Yet most of us are children of the ‘70’s who have a distinct environmentalism bias and believe in the old adage: “The end justifies the means.” We are seeing too many scientists and state biologists reporting half-truths and even fabricated results to support a particular philosophical position. For example, are you aware of the case in which government scientists planted lynx hairs in an area they wanted to protect from development? Even though they were discredited, they are still on the job.

Now we are seeing the same thing with CWD. The philosophical difference, as I noted earlier, is whether or not private citizens should be able to own and manage deer on their property. State agencies and the establishment in the wildlife profession are logically opposed to this. Recently, the Wildlife Management Institute published a cartoon booklet (*Supplemental Feeding, Just Say No!*) ridiculing private landowners who supplementally feed deer. Landowners who feed their deer are

shown in cartoons as drug dealers and felons. That's pretty serious stuff from an organization of scientists!

This is not the first disease issue we have faced with deer. Tuberculosis (TB) appeared in the '70's in Michigan, but news of the disease was suppressed until the early '90's when the infection rate became so high it could not be ignored any longer. The cry went out around the wildlife community that fenced deer had brought TB into Michigan. State DNR's pointed to the Michigan problem as evidence that fencing deer was evil.

I live by a law developed by a colleague many years ago: "Many a beautiful theory has been murdered by a ruthless gang of facts!" After the smoke cleared, it turns out virtually every fenced deer in Michigan was tested (more than 20,000), with not a single deer having the disease. The one herd reported in the late 1990's was shown to have contracted TB from wild deer, either fenced in on the ranch or by nose to nose contact through the fence.

Today, the only place in Michigan where you can be assured of killing a deer without TB is inside a fence: a sad state of affairs in my book. Where had the Michigan deer contracted TB? From untested cattle brought into the state many years ago from Mexico. It's not called bovine tuberculosis for nothing!

Now we are dealing with CWD, an even more deadly disease, the source of which is unclear. If we take Colorado authorities at their word, it may have been in the wild all along. As with TB and CWD, we never tested this thoroughly for a disease in the wild. Have they been there all along? Are we just now finding them due to intensive testing? Are there other diseases such as Johne's disease out there?

One thing is for sure. Each time a disease shows up, the finger gets pointed at fenced operations. Coincidentally, testing is usually intense only around existing fenced properties, and seldom takes place according to a random sampling scheme – something any scientist worth his salt would do. Another law I live by is: "If I hadn't believed it, I wouldn't have seen it with my own eyes!" How you sample for a disease can impact your conclusions about its origin.

As the facts come in, we are learning more about the situations involved. In the celebrated case of fenced elk in Nebraska, it turns out that wild deer fenced in with the elk may have been the source for the disease. Elk are notorious magnets for diseases and they could have easily picked it up from the trapped deer. In Wisconsin, the five cases reported there may have come from contaminated animal feed products, but this remains conjecture at this time. So, you see these are complex issues that require cooler heads.

These concerns take away from the real issues facing deer and wildlife management. Several years back, Dr. Harry Jacobson and I presented a paper in Scotland at the World Deer Congress that criticized the way deer are managed. The "hunter opportunity" model for deer management, in which the goal is to maximize harvest of antlered males has obviously failed. Agency biologists really get mad when we say this! Most states are still managing their deer on a restoration basis, not a management basis. Deer already are fully restored in this country! We are picking them out of the grills of Chevrolets! There are more deer here than when Columbus arrived!

Over-population leads to disease and we predicted in our presentation that diseases would soon appear. Now, several years later, bingo! We are not doing a good job of managing our deer herds. Fencing and privatization provide great "strawmen" to draw attention away from the real issues.

The 64-thousand dollar question is: “How do we ensure there will always be places for us to hunt deer?” We are losing at least 2 million acres of deer habitat a year to development. Anything that gets landowners to protect and manage deer on their properties is a “win-win” in my book.

State agencies fear anything new because it has the potential to threaten their financial support and power base. Most agencies operate (thank goodness) on license sales, fees and fines. Pittman-Robertson and Dingle-Johnson funds help. Loss of hunters means loss of funds and power. Credible studies show we are losing hunters, not to loss of hunter opportunity, but to changing lifestyles.

When I was a kid, I could walk out my back door and go hunting. I could hunt as long as I wanted and no one stopped me. Today, our kids grow up in cities, and even so-called rural kids are urban in lifestyle. Leisure time in America is at an all time low, especially mid-term discretionary time (weekends) when most hunting takes place. In Texas, where we practice the evil and much dreaded hunting lease program, only about 17% of the deer habitat is leased. There is a lot of land to hunt, but no one has time any more and landowners don't want anyone on their land.

Non-consumptive use is much worse. In the last five years, the Fish & Wildlife Service reports an 18% decline in non-consumptive uses such as backpacking, camping, bird watching, etc. So, intensive deer management and private ownership are not the problem.

What I fear in regard to the future of hunting is that, in their zeal to combat private deer management, some outdoor writers and state agency biologists will unwittingly kill our sport. The “baby will be thrown out with the bath water.” The hysteria and panic being stirred up by articles such as your 31 March piece are causing hunters to question whether or not they will even be in the field next year.

Already here at the Institute we are getting dozens of phone calls from frightened hunters who want to know if it is safe to hunt in Colorado or Wyoming this year! Last year's hunters are getting letters warning them not to eat the venison in their freezers. What message does that send, in spite of the fact that no cross-species transmission can be demonstrated? One of the more prominent outdoor magazines published articles last year claiming that three men have died from CWD which is a total lie! I hereby predict a significant decline in deer hunters next fall as a consequence.

Are disease issues real? You bet they are! I do not want to minimize their importance, but we need to adopt a more reasonable approach. I support your state's decision to halt importation of deer for a while so that things can be sorted out. But I cannot support any effort to use wildlife-vectored diseases as a weapon against private landowners who want to manage deer on their properties. I also think you should look at all deer importation, including carcasses. Stop and think about that little tidbit of information!

In my opinion, each state should institute two policies. First, they should begin managing deer on an ecological rather than a hunter opportunity basis. Second, they should develop a science-based disease monitoring program for their state. I would add that states need to begin working with landowners who want to manage deer, not against them.

[Letter to the Editor by Eric Robinson, President, Ontario Elk Breeders Association]

It is with some sadness that I find myself forced to respond to an article by Dr. David Suzuki recently printed in the *Owen Sound Sun Times*. I had grown to respect his opinion and statements on diverse issues. This article on chronic wasting disease and elk and deer farms lead me to believe that Dr. Suzuki might not research some of his articles enough and might be misled by some people into making ridiculous statements.

Imagine my surprise when I read Dr. Suzuki's statements regarding the rumours of three young Americans eating venison and coming down with Creutzfeldt-Jakob's Disease. This case was thoroughly investigated by the Centre for Disease Control in the United States. There was no connection established between eating venison and getting CJD. Dr. Suzuki should better research his facts prior to making such statements.

Dr. Suzuki then mentioned that there is cause for concern. Indeed, Canadian elk and deer farmers are concerned. Measures to control and eradicate the disease have been put in place. Self-regulations have been instituted, trace-back programs are in place, and research programs are being financed by the industry. However, let us remember that, as stated by the Food and Drug Administration TSE Advisory Committee in the US, there are no signs that CWD is transmissible to humans or to other types of livestock.

The Tuberculosis outbreak in the late 1980s was expensive, but certainly nowhere close to the estimate stated by Dr. Suzuki. Suzuki should be careful in quoting ridiculous numbers and losing his reputation by the same token. Making false statements is a dangerous thing. I would advise him to double-check his statements prior to misleading the public.

Elk and deer farms have paid in taxes much more than the cost of the Tuberculosis outbreak. This industry is a vibrant one and a productive part of agriculture.

Elk and deer farms have existed for centuries. To date, these types of farms exist in more than forty countries. In New Zealand, there are 2.8 million farmed deer and elk. It is considered an up-and-coming part of agriculture, a successful part of the diversification effort. More and more farmers are entering the industry.

What's next? Some wildlife activists have never accepted the existence of elk and deer farms and find every possible way to undermine our industry. These are not rational individuals. Some other wildlife activists have started a dialogue with our organizations and are more interested in meaningful discussion with potential cooperation. Some of our producers are volunteering with Parks Canada for the handling of elk in the West. Others are regularly asked to intervene in wild cervid management projects, etc. We believe that this type of cooperation is useful.

Chronic Wasting Disease was first identified in wild deer captured by the Colorado Wildlife Department and housed at a research facility. Rather than eradicating that herd, this wildlife agency sold animals to zoos, game farms and released some in the wild. To date, CWD has been identified in zoos, game farms and the wild. Surprising? Not to game farmers who say that this disease can be eradicated in domestic livestock but are concerned about the lack of surveillance in wild animals.

The largest game farm in Canada is Elk Island National Park. Elk are fenced in, fed through feed troughs and the population is managed by Parks Canada staff (a little more than a fenced enclosure,

Dr. Suzuki would say). Elk from this park are exported and released all over North America including Ontario. Is there a CWD surveillance program to ensure that elk exported by the Park are not carriers of this disease, and that wildlife managers are not spreading a disease into the wild in Northern Ontario? Sadly the answer is no!

Canadians should not be misled by the fallacies of Dr. Suzuki's article. Canadians should not accompany a few extreme wildlife activists in their crusade against agriculture. And again, Canadians should not forget that the experiments of some of these scientists are at the source of some of these diseases.

Livestock diseases exist in every type of farming. Falling prey to Dr. Suzuki's slippery slope of getting rid of one type of farming due to the existence of a disease is extremely dangerous for the farming community.

Dr. Suzuki is a well-known advocate for a cleaner environment. He should continue in that role. It would be better for him to continue to do that at which he is best and not get involved in a debate where he visibly is not getting the right information.

Elk and deer farmers have behaved responsibly and have established a good working relationship with the federal government, provincial governments (both agriculture and wildlife branches) and other organizations in order to solve livestock disease issues.

Our products are safe, and our producers and the government have put the necessary regulations in place to eradicate the disease in farms. New elk and deer farms are being started across the country on a regular basis. New processing plants for our products are opening (creating jobs and paying taxes), and auction places have been created in turn creating more jobs.

The Canadian government, provincial governments, other countries and 2,500 Canadian farming families consider elk and deer farming to have good potential for the enhancement of farm sustainability.

We are here to stay!

3. TIPS FOR CALVING

{By Russell Sawchuk from notes taken at a presentation by Dr. Glen Zebarth at the NAEBA 2002 Convention in Vegas}.

Preparations for calving should start during the breeding season. Have the elk cows that you plan to breed on a rising level of nutrition. This is very important. Feed them as much as they will eat. If they are gaining weight, conception rates will increase. If possible, turn your cows out into fresh pasture – forage is the best for them.

If pastures are light, feed good hay and maybe some grain. Good quality hay has 19% protein. The only grain that should be fed is oats, and maybe some corn. Feed 6-8 lbs per head per day, or 2-3 lbs if there is adequate pasture.

This is a good time to cull poor performing cows – those that won't conceive, have a history of birthing problems, or that over-mother. The percentage of cows that calve is the single most important economic factor that determines the profitability of your elk farm.

Since gestation is 245 days, remove breeding bulls (e.g., by November 15) to manage calving time. Cows that calve late usually have more problems. Use bulls that are proven breeders. Do a check on their fertility.

Check your cows in mid-December. Put them on hay with 12–14% protein. Provide supplemental mineral – a pound of pellets several times a week. Do not feed grain after the cows are pregnant.

In February and March, examine your cows. You should be able to see some ribs. They should not be fat. Early winter is a good time to give Vision 8 vaccinations as the immunity is transferred to the calves. It is also a good time to do any TB tests.

Two weeks before calving, increase their feed so they produce adequate milk supplies.

Rotate the location of calving each year. Try and have your cows calve on clean ground. This will do much more for disease prevention than any vaccines.

Group your cows for calving. The ideal number to monitor and tag is about 30 cows. If you know breeding dates, group cows by early calving group and by late calving group. There is an advantage to have calves about the same age. This prevents spread of “bugs” and disease. Have heifers calve in a separate group. This will cause less problems and will reduce the risk of older cows stealing the heifer's calves.

Cows will walk the fence for ten days to two weeks prior to calving. As calving approaches, cows will walk in earnest or even run. During this time, you need to watch cows closely – at least twice a day or every 4 hours. Do a head count.

Calving problems with elk are not very common but do occur. When it comes to assisting cows with calving problems, know your limits and comfort zone. If you feel you are going to be in over your head, get professional help.

Wait 3 hours before intervention if nothing happens. If parts of the calf are sticking out but nothing is happening, you should intervene sooner. If you have to pull a calf, this will create many new problems. If only the head and one leg is sticking out, there is a guaranteed problem. If only the head is showing, there is a problem. A significant number of elk calves are born backwards.

If you need to pull a calf out, do so without anesthetic. If you do use a drug, reverse both cow and calf. Elk cows will tolerate assistance from people.

Get the cow into a chute if possible. Have all the necessary equipment ready – soft rope, plastic sleeves, etc. – clean and disinfected. Cows will get infections if equipment is not clean. If you have to go into the birth canal, there is a greater risk of infection. Give the cow antibiotics afterwards.

When pulling the calf out, do it by hand, and be gentle. Calves are easily injured. If the calf is difficult to extract, get the help of a vet. Calves come out in an arc; pull down towards the cow's heels. Do a c-section in an emergency. However, the conception rate after a c-section is only 50%.

After the calf is pulled, put both animals on clean straw. Watch the cow to make sure she accepts the calf. There is no need to hide; the cow knows you are there. If the cow starts licking the calf, she has accepted it. You also need to make sure the calf is nursing. If you are not sure, provide supplemental feedings.

First feedings should be colostrums which is best obtained from an elk cow that has lost its calf. This can be obtained by putting the cow in a chute and milking her with a 60 cc syringe or using a vacuum pump. If you take it slow and easy, the cow won't kick. Freeze the milk for later use. Elk milk is best, but you can use colostrums from sheep, goat or dairy cow as well.

Feed the calf 4 times a day until you are sure the calf is nursing. If the calf is content, then it is nursing; if it is wandering around, then there is a problem.

Watch for cows with over-mothering syndrome (constantly licking the rectum and eventually destroying the anus). Some sort of cloth protection may be required for the calf, or you may have to bottle-feed it. You may also want to consider culling that cow from your breeding herd to avoid future problems.

Calves drink lot of water. Give them pans of clean water. Also keep the calves away from swamps and mud holes to decrease risk of disease and infection.

4. COMPRESSION SHOWS POTENTIAL FOR VELVET REMOVAL

[By Russell Sawchuk from notes taken at presentations by Dr. Al Schaefer and Dr. Jim Webster (New Zealand) at the Alberta Elk Association 2002 Convention.]

The New Zealand deer industry has been looking for non-drug methods of velvet antler removal for some time. The driving forces are concerns for animal welfare and possible drug contamination of velvet antler destined for human consumption.

The ideal removal procedures are a) humane, b) sans side effects, c) quick and d) easy, convenient and safe.

Compression or blocking of the nerve has been known since 1933. The procedure involves high pressure to block the nerves to the antlers. It is rapid and reversible. Compression takes about 4 minutes per antler.

Researchers in New Zealand and Alberta carried out similar studies comparing compression to more standard procedures such as Lidocaine and electronic analgesia (EA).

The Alberta researchers found that compression and Lidocaine were about equally effective. EA has great variability and thus was a more risky procedure.

The New Zealand study found no differences between the efficacy of Lidocaine and compression. Over 90% of the animals were non-aversive during the treatments. There were also no differences in long term stress. The compression method resulted in 30 to 60 gram lighter antlers due to slower growth (not a significant difference).

In summary, the research found that the high compression technique for velvet antler removal:

- Was effective
- Was not any more stressful than current procedures
- Did not affect long-term production
- Did not require needles or drugs
- Was easy to use.

As velvet removal season approaches this year, elk producers may want to consider using this procedure. Consult with your local elk association or your vet for more information.

5. THE SAGE OF BUCKSNORT

Dog days continue in Bucksnot. But dog days haven't dampened Gene Gibbon's idea of raising goats. Since he retired, he's forever dreaming up new schemes to fill time. This time, though, his wife, Judy, is absolutely opposed to what she calls "another loose-screw idea."

"I'm not going to live with a herd of smelly goats!" she told Gene. "It's bad enough with all those geese and ducks you give shelter to! It's like walking on greased grass around here!"

Gene's a guy who has to be involved in something. Without work to go to each day, how to fill each day is a problem.

When he retired, he decided to grow Christmas trees. But he belatedly discovered that once they're planted you've got about a decade to kill.

Then he opened a tomato and peach stand in the front yard. But that only gave him something to do a quarter of the year. September to May was a black hole.

"I wished he'd get interested in the Internet, fish, whittle, anything," Judy told her sister.

Gene talks about milking the goats, marketing milk, and making and selling cheese. It would be a year-round activity that could produce income, especially if he could extend sales out of town. So he says.

"I'm glad I've got things to do. Men are so unimaginative!" Judy said.

"Raising goats is pretty imaginative," Judy corrected. "There's imagination, and then there's fantasy!"

It's the vacuum created by the kids being grown and gone, financial security to live comfortably with savings and a pension, that can create the conditions for monkey-mind.

That's Gene's problem: monkey-mind. He can't find a focus to sufficiently engage him. Hence goats for fun and profit.

He got the idea from an article he read about a farmer who was in the goat business. He went to see the operation. The goat man told him about the virtues and rewards of goat growing.

He said, "They eat anything, they're inexpensive to buy, they take care of themselves, little land is needed to feed them, they produce milk which is highly desired by some, especially those allergic to cow milk, you can make fine cheese with ease, and finally, you can eat them."

All this made sense to Gene. He envisioned himself a gentry goat man, surveying daily his kingdom of grazing goats. Keeping him engaged, making him money eating only weeds, good to eat.

There's quite a few seniors in Bucksnot who're dealing with the same thing: what to do with the rest of their life. Several are after-breakfast fixtures at the Yesterday Cafe.

Gene, though, is determined that the Yesterday Cafe scene is not for him. He has to be involved, even if it is with growing Christmas trees, selling tomatoes and peaches, or dabbling in duck raising.

If we live long enough, many of us will face the same challenges Gene and Judy face. It's not easy.

Fortunately, though, our choice isn't absolutely between raising goats or becoming an old goat. I've thus far avoided both by being an observer of people.

It certainly beats watching Christmas trees grow.

[Jack Reeves' regular columns can be read at <http://www.theweekly.com/subs/reeves.html>]

6. INDUSTRY NEWS

NADeFA moves

The office of the North American Deer Farmers Association has moved from Maryland to Wisconsin. The new contact information is:

Phyllis Menden
Executive Director, NADeFA
1720 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Appleton, WI 54914

Phone: 920-734-0934
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Web: <http://www.nadefa.org>

Prions not found in muscle

France's food safety agency (AFSSA) found no evidence of prions in cattle muscle infected with BSE.

French scientists scrambled to test cattle muscle after American researchers said they had, for the first time, discovered prions in muscle tissue, albeit in mice that were infected under laboratory conditions.

The French agency also said tests on sheep, goats and mice infected with BSE or a related illness showed no sign of the prion in muscle tissue.

The American study raised concerns about the possible spread of the Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease to humans through the eating of meat from BSE infected cattle. The US research has also been mentioned by game farm opponents suggesting potential health threats from eating venison from CWD-infected cervids.

NO CWD found in Saskatchewan wild deer and elk

Testing of about 4,000 heads from wild elk, white-tailed and mule deer shot in Saskatchewan found no signs of chronic wasting disease.

Hunters turned in 5,300 heads in 2001. The government instituted a sampling program after two wild mule deer shot in the Manitou Sand Hills near Lloydminster tested positive for CWD.

The Saskatchewan environment department will continue monitoring for the disease in the wild for three to five years.

Results of the testing program are available on the Canadian Co-operative Wildlife Health Centre web site at <http://wildlife.usask.ca/cwd2001/>

Manitoba and Alberta have also tested about two thousand heads each from wild cervids. All have been CWD negative.

Scientists close in on live animal BSE test

German scientists say they are closer to developing the first reliable method of testing live animals for mad cow disease. Only dead animals can now be tested for the fatal disorder, principally using brain tissue.

Researchers, headed by Bertram Brenig at Goettingen University in central Germany are developing the new test, which is based on detecting changes in the blood of the animal infected with BSE. Could a live-animal test for CWD be coming soon?

Humanely raised meat in demand

A Winnipeg butcher is finding a good market for his meat labeled humane by the Winnipeg Humane Society. The "humane" label guarantees the meat comes from animals that were not caged, that had adequate space, that were not treated with growth hormones, that were not treated with antibiotics unless they were sick, and that were independently inspected. The meat costs about 10% more, but the customers don't seem to mind.

Consumers at his store are showing more interest in non-traditional meats such as free-range musk ox, bison and venison. They are searching for meat that is more natural and less processed.

[Source: *Western Producer*, April 4, 2002]

CCC hiring PR agent

The Canadian Cervid Council is hiring a public relations agent responsible for improving communications with the media on behalf of the deer and elk industry in Western Canada. The individual will be located at the Alberta Elk Centre in Leduc, Alberta. For more information, contact Serge Buy, Executive Director at <mailto:buy@glen-net.ca> or phone: 613-874-9994

No more CWD found in Alberta

The CFIA has reported that eleven out of the twelve trace-outs from Farm 40, where one bull elk was discovered to have CWD, have tested negative. An elk on this farm died in 1991, and is now recognized as having displayed symptoms suggestive of CWD infection. That elk is believed to have been originally from Colorado.

CWD contamination project

Highly CWD contaminated premises in Saskatchewan will be the sites for a program that is designed to monitor the results of placing healthy elk on these farms for a given period of time. Each participating farm will be stocked with 75 bull elk. The program is being run by the CFIA with support from the Canadian Cervid Council and participation of the owners of these premises.

CWD and deer scents

Here is the latest misinformation being spread by opponents to the game farming industry. According to a recent article in the National Post (Canada), hunters may be spreading CWD by using deer scents made from the urine of infected animals from game farms. The urine, spread on the ground to lure big bucks, could contain prions, and thus spread the disease to wild deer coming into contact with it.

The health precautions taken by game ranchers make it highly unlikely that any disease would be spread by packaged urine. However, producers and distributors may want to update their labels and marketing information to make it clear that their urine comes from "CWD monitored," TB free, accredited herds and that their animals are free of any diseases. Also, it may be useful to have the urine "pasteurized" to reduce the risk of spreading any harmful bacteria and viruses to hunters and wildlife.

7. EVENTS CALENDAR

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

DEER BRANCH NEW ZEALAND VETERINARY ASSOCIATION Annual Seminar will be held in Nelson, New Zealand May 15-17, 2002. This is a technical conference for veterinarians, researchers and advanced farmers. This conference will be in the week preceding the NZ Deer Farmers' Association Conference in Wellington. Enquiries to Peter Wilson, at <mailto:P.R.Wilson@massey.ac.nz> or fax 0064 6 3505616

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

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

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

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

TEXAS DEER ASSOCIATION 4TH ANNUAL CONVENTION AND AUCTION will be held September 6-7, 2002 at San Antonio, Texas USA. For more information call 210-767-8300 or visit <http://www.texasdeerassociation.com>

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

SECOND ANTLER SCIENCE AND PRODUCT TECHNOLOGY SYMPOSIUM will be held in February 2004 in Queenstown, New Zealand. For more information contact Mark O'Connor at <mailto:mark.oconnor@nzgib.org.nz> or phone +64 4 473 4500.

***** A D *****

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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.

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

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