

Welcome to the SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2004 edition of *Deer & Elk Farmers' Digest*, a bi-monthly electronic newsletter for those interested in raising deer, elk, and reindeer. This *Digest* is published by the Deer & Elk Farmers' Information Network ([www.Deerfarmer.com](http://www.Deerfarmer.com) and [www.Elkfarmer.com](http://www.Elkfarmer.com)).

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**\*\*\* FROM THE EDITOR \*\*\***

This issue was inspired by a letter I received from Bill Donahue describing a bad experience he had with a hunt preserve. In my article, I take a look at how well-operated, ethical preserves can stop the decline in hunting, and contribute to positive hunting experiences. Dan Marsh argues that the hunt preserve industry needs to adopt some sort of certification process to protect legitimate owners/operators and their clients.

Ron Laughlin gives us an update on what is happening in the New Zealand deer farming industry. Finally, I review some really exciting research findings on the athletic and health benefits of velvet antler. As usual, our Events Calendar includes veterinarian conferences, pet shows, and other marketing opportunities of interest to deer, elk and reindeer farmers.

Russell Sawchuk, Editor

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# 1. A Bad Hunt Preserve Experience

*By Bill Donahue.*

While I would never intentionally give my patronage to a deer or elk hunting farm, I do not believe that these farms should be closed as long as they clearly state what they are doing. My objection is that there are farms out there that are claiming to offer “fair chase” hunts when in fact they are offering “canned” hunts. My hunting partner and I were recently fleeced out of almost \$18,000 by one of these unethical farmers. This is our story.

My hunting partner, Charles Gile and I were originally scheduled to accompany a film crew to ABC Outfitters in 2003, but the US ban on Canadian meat caused us to postpone our hunt until this year. The chance to have a guided hunt of four animals on 100,000 acres of private land under fair chase conditions for about \$9,000 seemed like a dream come true.

I had heard of other chances to kill bison that were essentially harvests and not hunts. In these “harvests” you simply shoot the bison standing in the pasture. That is not hunting, nor is it anything remotely similar to fair chase conditions! I called George Smith of ABC Outfitters to confirm that this was indeed a fair chase hunt and not a harvest. He assured me that this hunt would be under fair chase conditions and that we would be hunting free ranging animals on 100,000 acres of private land. Based upon that information, I sent in my deposit and anxiously awaited for the hunt for almost two years.

After three days of driving from Southern California, Charles and I arrived at ABC Outfitters. The first thing that we saw was a herd of elk behind an eight-foot fence. I hadn't even unpacked when I confronted George Smith about the situation, explaining that shooting farm-raised elk inside pens was not hunting. I hoped that I didn't just drive 39 hours to do just that.

George then lied right to my face and told me that we would be hunting free ranging animals under fair chase conditions. His explanation for having penned up elk was that he was planning to sell them and that he was required by law to keep them for five years before they could be sold. Upon those assurances, and seeing several awards from Safari Club International on his wall, I paid George the balance owed on the hunts for Charles and I.

Imagine our surprise the very next morning when we were driven out to our assigned pens to shoot farm-raised elk as they grazed inside pastures surrounded by eight-foot high fences. Charles and I didn't kill any animals on the first morning and when we returned to camp Charles confronted George about the situation. He explained that we hadn't signed up for a canned hunt. We were promised a guided hunt under fair chase conditions and that this was no more a fair chase hunt than shooting cattle in a pasture. We asked for our money back. George refused any refund despite the fact that Charles and I were enticed to book this hunt based on the false claims made personally by George insisting that this was a fair chase hunt.

Charles was so disgusted with the prospect of killing animals in a cage that he wanted to leave immediately. I argued that without a refund that we needed to make the best of a bad situation and at least get the meat for our money. After considerable discussion we stayed and killed the animals included in the safari package.

There were 10 hunters at ABC Outfitters during the period we were there. One hunter had been to ABC Outfitters four times and saw no problem with killing caged animals. The other nine men were all in agreement that this was not hunting. It certainly wasn't even remotely close to hunting under fair chase

conditions. I consider canned hunts to be unethical and selling canned hunts under the guise of being guided hunts under fair chase conditions seems like fraud to me.

My question for you is: “What can be done to stop these canned hunts from advertising themselves as fair chase hunts and prevent

men like George Smith from fleecing more people that believe that they are going on a real hunt?”

[The real names of the outfitter and his company have been changed to avoid legal liability issues. Ed.]

## 2. The Future of Hunt Preserves

*By Russell Sawchuk, Deer & Elk Farmers' Information Network.*

The previous article illustrates the best and the worst features about hunt preserves. One of the best features is that preserves offer great opportunities to harvest big game trophies that are no longer available or affordable in the wild. On the flipside, one of the worst features is that unethical hunt preserve operators can turn off enough hunters and supporters to jeopardize the entire industry.

Make no mistake about it. The anti-hunting opponents are well organized and funded. Their strategy is to first close down hunt preserves or places that offer canned hunts. Once this is done, then they will work on getting legislation passed to completely prohibit hunting and fishing. After all, they will argue, why does civilized man need to kill animals, birds and fish?

In order to survive, the hunt preserve industry needs to set high standards and self regulate (see following article). The industry must offer public awareness, education and hunting experiences that meet the diverse philosophies and styles of hunters.

### Hunting on the Decline

Even though 13 million Americans hunted in 2001, hunting participation continues to decline. According to studies by Responsive Management of Virginia, the following factors have contributed to the decline in hunting interest:

- Not enough access to places to hunt (46%)
- Not having enough places to hunt (44%)
- Work obligations (42%)
- Poor behaviour by other hunters (39%)
- Too many hunters in the field (35%).

Three of the four most common reasons that former hunters stopped hunting relate to time constraints. Inactive hunters reported that lack of time (41%), work obligations (37%) and family obligations (36%) were the main reasons they stopped hunting.

It seems to me that hunt preserves address most, if not all, of these issues. For that reason, I believe that well-managed, ethical preserves can have a great future.

### Benefits of Hunt Preserves

Hunt preserves can offer viable alternatives to the obstacles and frustrations that many of today's hunters face. These challenges include:

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). Hunt 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. Hunt 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 on the 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 different 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 to spend two weeks with an outfitter and not even see 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 US and Canadian economies having done relatively 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* – the 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 preserves 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 which most of us don't have! Preserve hunting does not require the same level of skill, and is ideal for persons 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. 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 recently associated with public hunting? 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 others 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* –with the new firearm regulations in Canada, buying and owning a gun is becoming a real hassle. Many people who previously used to hunt 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 many of the hassles and problems described above. It is no wonder that people that love to hunt are turning to preserves.

In addition to the above, hunt preserves offer a number of other broader economic benefits. These include such things as:

1. *Support to elk and deer industries* – as these continue to grow, markets are needed for the older, mature bucks and elk bulls. Hunt preserves provide greater per animal revenues

for trophy animals than would other markets such as venison.

2. *Value-added revenues stay at home* – hunt preserves usually pay producers 50% of the final value of the trophy animal. By having your own preserve, or by selling to a local preserve, this money stays in your pocket and in your community.

3. *Increased tourism and spin-off revenues* – hunt preserves can attract clients from other regions of the country, and from other countries. This brings in significant tourism revenues, and provides opportunities for other local businesses as well, e.g., motels, taxidermists, meat processors, etc.

4. *Support rural communities* – because of their very nature, most hunt preserves are best located in remote, rural areas. A hunt preserve can contribute significantly to the sustainability and economy of rural communities.

5. *Increased tourism in off-seasons* – fall is the slow period with tourism in North America, but is the peak hunting season. Thus, hunt preserves can extend the tourism season in regions where they exist.

6. *Relieving pressure on wild game hunting* – by attracting more hunters, preserves can reduce the numbers of people who hunt on public lands and areas.

7. *Improved health of animals* – most of the research and health advancements related to deer and elk have been the result of work initiated, funded and supported by the deer and elk farming industry. This knowledge and strategies can also be used to diagnose and improve the health of wild herds.

8. *Opportunities for handicapped hunters* – many preserves offer special hunts for people with disabilities. Many of these people, especially youth, would not otherwise be able to enjoy this experience of a lifetime.

9. *Diversion of pressure* from non-resident hunters will shorten the list for some draws.

Hunt preserves, like other tourism businesses, offer many environmental, ecological and economic benefits.

### **Code of Ethics**

Because of the diversity of opinions regarding hunt preserves, operators would be wise to adopt and follow a code of ethics. This code assures clients and the general public that the operation of the hunt preserve follows certain, acceptable standards.

You can make up your own code of ethics, but it is probably easier to use ones that have already been established. We particularly like the code of ethics created by the North American Elk Breeders Association because it addresses the major concerns regarding hunting behind high wire.

The NAEBA Code of Ethics for hunt preserves says:

1. The operations should assure harvesting in any area by any method which, through a combination of size, terrain, and vegetative cover, provides an animal with a reasonable opportunity to avoid being found or, having been found, to evade the hunter, i.e., fair chase.

2. Harvesting operations should offer hunting opportunities for physically challenged hunters.

3. Trophy operations should be enclosed in game fence that excludes wild animals from the enclosure and retains commercially raised animals within the enclosure. Within the trophy operation, only commercially raised animals will be harvested.

4. Trophy animals placed in a harvest operation should exhibit their natural flight instinct.

5. The animals should be self-sufficient for forage, water, and shelter. Supplemental feeding is permitted.

6. Each hunt should include a guide to ensure humane harvesting.

7. Harvest area should be a size to include recovery of trophy animals.

8. Hunters should possess familiarity with weapon of choice.

9. If the hunter does not want the meat from the harvested animal, it should be used by the harvest operation or donated to a charitable organization that will distribute it to families in need.

10. Proper postmortem testing must be done to monitor herd health.

This Code of Ethics was developed to outline the elk industry's definition of an acceptable private hunting operation. North American Elk Breeders Association is an agricultural breed association; members sell their trophy elk to hunt preserves. NAEBA strongly recommends that members of their association sell elk only to operations that meet the above guidelines.

We would encourage that all deer and elk hunt preserves adopt this Code (or a similar one). Once you do, post it in your lodge, and let clients and the public know that you subscribe and follow a code of ethics. If all preserves would do so, it would go a long way towards addressing concerns people may have about hunt farms and ranches.

[Much of the information in this article was previously published in the March 2001 issue of the Digest. Ed.]

### 3. Hunt Preserves Certification

*By Dan Marsh, a lawyer and Executive Director of the Michigan Deer and Elk Farmers Association.*

The deer and elk farming industry needs seriously to address the issues surrounding preserve hunting. Otherwise, opponents will continue to attack hunting and will get laws passed that will negatively affect these operations. They may even be successful, as was done in Montana, in closing down private hunting preserves.

While we all agree “fair chase” is not definable, we know a “canned” hunt is repugnant to the professional hunting community. We know that although we cannot define a canned hunt, we know one when we see one. However, there are those in the public that want to provide strict standards on what fair chase is. Such standard setting should not be left to those outside of the hunting community. Further, once a standard is set in law or regulation, no matter how “flexible,” it will be the beginning of constant controversy initiated by “anti’s” and fought in the legislatures. The likely result will be further regulation to appease the controversy makers and the restriction of our businesses.

It has been frequently demonstrated that industries and professions that engage in self-policing activities are less likely to become regulated. Credentialing is an accepted form of self-regulation and has effectively warded off government interference in a number of industries and professions. In the event that an opposition group seeks to make the credentialing standards a law, we can make the argument that such legislative interference negatively affects our business activity and revenue streams. It is not appropriate for government to interfere with an established business activity when there is no harm being done.

I am seeking members of deer and elk farming associations, and conservation and hunting

organizations, to bring forward the concept for standard setting, certification, and accreditation of preserve hunting to their leadership.

Many associations have initiated certification (otherwise referred to as credentialing or professional designation) programs. These programs typically award a certificate or degree to individuals who have met the specified criteria. Those criteria usually include some combination of experience and testing and a generally accepted, or as close to consensus as possible, concept of ethical hunting.

Implementation of standards, available for public and industry use, acts as a deterrent to unethical practices. It encourages competition since the consumer is provided with a basis for the purchasing decision. Besides the price comparisons, standardization enables intelligent comparisons between ethical and unethical practices, using the industry guide as a foundation for judgment. Consumer conclusions drawn by reference to established standards relating to basic product qualities constitute a primary advantage to the hunter in his search of an ethical hunt.

The business of certification is a demanding process and will require a commitment on the part of the industry’s leadership and members. The cornerstone of the credentialing program will be the enforcement of standards. I must stress that this is a business that will require extensive planning not only to create but also to implement and market. In an effort to get this first step in place, I am providing a generic mission statement for a certification program below.

“The private deer manager program is dedicated to enhancing and promoting the

profession of raising and harvesting privately owned deer by providing premier credentialing in the industry.

The private deer manager program accomplishes this mission by:

- establishing standards for entry level professional practice;
- creating a fair, valid, and reliable examination process by which professionals can demonstrate their knowledge and skill;
- granting certification to those who meet the programs standards;
- and communicating the value of the credential to consumers and other key constituents.”

The certification concept would be a giant step forward for those concerned about the deer production industry and hunting ethics.

Setting standards (based upon whatever can be agreed to) will go a long way toward a more positive image with many folks. We know we will never get approval from animal rights supporters, but we shouldn't expect that.

This may even be pursued in the future to link with the Natural Resource and Wildlife Agencies, so that they also could feel comfortable with what is agreed to.

Here are some thoughts that may be discussed on this issue. Ideally, any harvesting in the preserves should not be governed by “hunting” definitions. The nature of the fencing may be seen as providing a greater opportunity to take an animal, or more specifically, a particular animal. Hunting regulations by nature are designed to take the advantage away from the hunter with the possible escape of the animal always being a possibility. We need to consider whether the industry and wildlife agencies would all be better off if the activity of harvest in the privately owned cervidae facilities was not tied to normal “take” regulations. Just food for thought.

It has come time for the industry to take a lead role in building coalitions with Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources in the major deer states and/or those states where the privately owned deer industry has the greatest number of operations.

The CWD scare, no matter how it comes out, should be looked upon as a wake up notice to the industry leaders. I say this for a couple of reasons.

First, it should be obvious to most that a bit of bad information from either the Agriculture or Natural Resource agencies can cause problems for the industry. It puts the industry in a reactive mode, trying to justify why they should remain in business. Secondly, the industry needs to maintain as much public support or at least public neutrality as possible. They can't do that in a vacuum by themselves.

I would submit that the industry should be proactive and invite the leaders of the agencies to sit and discuss the issues. We should obtain a mutual understanding and assistance to make changes to have an industry that is looked at as Natural Resource friendly. It can be very easy for the agencies to turn the public attitude more negative toward the industry. Remember, what will keep the industry solid is a supportive or at least neutral public toward the industry operations.

I think there is a way to obtain better acceptance from the agencies. The deer and elk production industry must be open to working with the agencies to promote mutual goals and objectives. This is where a certification program for harvesting operations would be the key. We know this is a sensitive issue within the industry. It is tough for them to buy into the idea for many reasons. But the most important thing that needs to happen is for real leadership to take the industry over. This means opening up the books, making efforts to get those who operate “on the edge”



either into a totally legitimate operation, or out of business.

From the Agriculture side, I would look at ways to promote the industry as keeping lands in green space as part of the long term goal to maintain farming as a sort of “Forest lands for the future” concept. From the Natural Resource side, I would look at establishing standards which would significantly reduce the issues raised by the resource agencies. Push the mutual need to maintain hunters. The game bird business is widely accepted by the agencies. How do you build the same support for big game production facilities? You have to look at the issues concerning disease transmission, escapes, policing/enforcement of the movement of animals and parts, and then the big one, fair chase. I think all of them can be worked out with agencies, but it will take a much time and effort.

Another option is to look at legal remedies, but they eat a lot of time and effort. This option probably will not produce positive images for the industry particularly if the CWD issue continues to be promoted the way it is by some of the agencies. The industry needs to be out front leading the charge for testing for CWD, for pushing the agencies to work with them to solve the problems (at least identify them) to make the industry a viable and respected part of both the Agriculture and Natural Resource communities.

If this doesn't happen, the industry will survive, but it will not have the ability to grow. It will be so hamstrung by regulations and negative impressions it will be reduced to only those who can operate totally independent of other operators. And that will not allow growth.

This proposal is to create a certification program concerning preserve hunting. The certification program could require the creation of mandatory standards before the entry of a score is permitted in the record book for antlers that come from preserves.

Certification standards could include standards for:

- ethical issues such as fair chase and baiting
- business standards such as capital requirements, business planning, herd population tracking and control
- animal husbandry issues such as genetic control (record keeping), pasture management, artificial insemination, embryo transfer, etc.
- animal welfare (health, nutrition, etc.)
- expenses required for regulatory compliance
- the address of concerns of the State(s) Natural Resource Departments and Agriculture Departments.

This will further require organizations to actually examine and test preserve owners and certify that they do meet particular standards or established criteria. Also, continuing education seminars, courses, and materials can be sold to those that are certified to maintain the knowledge level required for certification.

Such certification should help preserve owners increase their client base. That is, it can be beneficial to be able to assure potential clients that a preserve will comply with standards acceptable to certain organizations. For this reason, preserve owners may be angered when an organization chooses to withdraw an existing certification. As such, there must be procedures put in place that will adequately notify customers of certification activities and preserve owners on the removal of a certification.

This proposal is a new direction. It will require consensus to the standards proposed to be implemented before antlers are submitted into the record book. There will need to be education of the standards and enforcement of the standards. This will require both resources of time and funding.

However, certification application fees can cover some of the cost of the certification program. So can continuing education, seminars, and products (informational materials) for the certification to be maintained. While this non-dues revenue will be attractive, the most important aspect of this program is the ability to set a proper standard and enforce the standard in a manner that fits due process under the law.

The first start is to form a committee to look at all that is required to form, implement, and enforce such a program. A report and recommendation can be presented at annual membership meetings.

[Anyone interested in being involved in the hunt preserve certification project should contact Dan Marsh. Ed.]

## 4. New Zealand Deer Farming 2004

*by Ron Laughlin with supporting information provided by Matt Moyes, Venison Marketing Services Manager, Deer Industry New Zealand.*

The New Zealand deer industry is the world's largest farmed deer industry. Reflecting the original imported wild population, the majority of New Zealand's herd (about 85%) is red deer. The balance of the national herd is predominantly elk. Hybridization between red deer and elk is common, especially for commercial venison production. There are also small numbers of fallow deer farmed.

There are an estimated 5,000 commercial deer farms in New Zealand, ranging in size from the small lifestyle properties to extensive ranches (called stations here). Generally deer are farmed as part of a diversified livestock portfolio with sheep and cattle. There are approximately two million deer farmed in New Zealand (estimate as of 30 June 2003). This equates to half of the world's farmed deer population. Split roughly forty per cent in the North Island and sixty per cent in the South Island, there are an estimated 1.4 million hinds and 600,000 stags.

New Zealand has three basic types of deer farming operations: breeding, venison finishing and velvet production. Farmers may concentrate on one or a combination.

The New Zealand deer industry is a relatively young industry but has expanded rapidly over

the past decade. Deer are not native to New Zealand but were brought here from England and Scotland for sport in the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The environment proved ideal and feral populations grew uncontrolled. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century feral deer were regarded as pests because of their negative impact on the environment. The Department of Conservation today maintains an eradication program by paid hunters to try to keep the herds in check.

Export of venison from feral deer started in the 1960's by turning a pest into an export earner. Industry pioneers saw an opportunity to build on this base and in the early 1970's started capturing live deer from the wild and farming them. A new industry was born and rapidly spread throughout the country. Videos of those early days shows the wild spirit of the early industry pioneers as they jumped from helicopters on to the back of running deer.

As it turned out, New Zealand was actually fortunate to have such an extensive feral population of red deer, which are arguably the best species of deer to farm. Their easy handling, strongly social nature and adaptability to New Zealand pastures makes them a particularly easy and productive animal to farm. They have the ability to naturally crossbreed with great diversity of

strains and sub-species of cervids. The planned use of genes for size and growth is just one factor in extending the range and diversity of farm operations that allow a flexible approach to supplying different markets.

Deer Industry New Zealand and the New Zealand Deer Farmer's Association have joined forces with AgResearch and Meat & Wool New Zealand's genetic evaluation service Sheep Improvement Ltd. to set up a national genetic evaluation system. This is a major step in future herd improvements.

New Zealand's sheep, beef and dairy industries already evaluate their flocks and herds on a national basis. A national system for the deer industry will allow the breeding values of deer throughout the country to be independently evaluated, identifying the top genetics required by the deer industry to meet market demand. That will mean a long-term sustainable improvement to the genetic base of the New Zealand herd, and ultimately to the economics of deer farming.

The new genetic evaluation system builds on a genetic evaluation service established by AgResearch to promote performance recording. Live weight, velvet weights and close accurate pedigrees from several New Zealand deer herds have already recorded and combined statistically to establish breeding values for individual performance traits. Work is to start shortly on modifying the software and loading data. It is expected the system will be available in early 2005.

The relative profitability of deer farming compared with other land based enterprises is one of the key drivers behind this expansion. The results of analysis on various enterprises indicate that historically deer farming profitability has exceeded that of traditional sheep and beef breeding and finishing.

The industry is committed to developing year round consumption. Significant potential is

also seen as retail worldwide, with new products developed and consumer programs held.

Farm raised New Zealand venison is exported worldwide. However, Western Europe (including Scandinavia) is the major market taking approximately 85% of the total exports. Germany is the largest single market. The USA is the industry's main export market outside of Europe.

A major German retail initiative named "sommerkampagne" has just finished with outstanding results. It was the largest single European summer retail promotion the industry has ever seen. Clearly it was a success. With an \$800,000+ retail investment, it was definitely value for money. Its aim was to introduce the German consumer to New Zealand venison.

There was a strong media focus in consumer publications with circulation of 2.2 million along with barbecue workshops in Munich and Hamburg for journalists and editors.

The promotion was in supermarkets with a raft of new materials from recipe books to mobiles. Besides the consumers, the promotion targeted the trade. Sales folders have helped them sell the promotion to retailers alongside trade advertising and workshops. The biggest part of it was via the website where over 100,000 consumers entered the competition to win flights to New Zealand by registering for a recipe book. The major focus was the consumer.

Along with this promotion, the increase of the Chef Program played a large part the last twelve months. The program worked with more chefs, butcher and sales force demonstrations plus visits to more markets. A new CD has been developed that is an interactive chef-to-chef workshop with videos of farming, fabrication, storage and cooking that the chef or sales staff can take home.

In addition to the strong industry in venison, velvet is a significant part of the deer farming industry in New Zealand. Korea is the largest market, taking more than 80% of New Zealand's deer velvet production. A new velvet producer co-operative has just been launched. Veleco Co-operative Group Ltd, has a base of the largest and most committed velvet growers in the country. Their goal is to apply commercial solutions to move New Zealand velvet from a commodity to supplying a range of branded products to a wider consumer base.

For the industry itself as a whole, new deer industry rules are to be introduced in October 2004. The Deer Industry New Zealand Regulations 2004 will replace the Game Industry Board Regulations 1985, implementing reforms arising from industry

consultation in 1999. The board will be restructured with 50% representation from producers and 50% from processor-exporters and share the 50-50 venison levy.

In conclusion, the New Zealand deer industry is as healthy as it has ever been. With new concepts and promotions, and a strong Deer Industry New Zealand, the future will continue to grow and prosper at a very high level.

Contact information for the Deer Industry New Zealand are:

Deer Industry New Zealand  
POB 10702, Wellington, New Zealand

Or by websites at: [www.deernz.org](http://www.deernz.org),  
[www.nzvenison.com](http://www.nzvenison.com), and [www.velvet.org.nz](http://www.velvet.org.nz)

## 4. Velvet Antler Good for the Heart

A recent study of American weight-lifters taking velvet antler supplements showed positive results. The subjects in the Benedictine University study were 34 men from 18 to 35 years of age. Each had at least four years of weight lifting experience.

In this double-blind study, the experimental group was given 1,350 mg of velvet antler powder twice a day while the placebo group was given an inert substance. Before and immediately after the ten-week experiment, the subjects were put through a series of tests and measurements.

At the end of the research trial, the weight lifters that had been taking the velvet antler had:

- Less fat on their torsos
- Lower LDL cholesterol levels
- Greater aerobic capacity
- Less muscle damage
- Greater strength
- Greater stamina.

The researchers found that by the end of the trial, the athletes on velvet antler had reduced the trunk to limb fat ratio from 104.7 to 101.0. There was no measured effect on weight or body mass indices. The significance of this, according to Dr. Craig Broeder the lead researcher, lies in the influence of fat deposition patterns on the risk of heart disease. Increased fat around the trunk is a major cardiovascular risk factor.

The group taking velvet antler also showed a significant decline in LDL cholesterol concentrations by 12.2 per cent. As a result, the LDL/HDL (good/bad cholesterol) ratio also declined 8.4 per cent. This would reduce the group's risk of cardiovascular disease. There was also some evidence that the velvet antler was effective in lowering blood pressure. There were no negative effects observed for the liver and kidney enzyme markers.

In terms of muscle strength, the group taking the velvet antler showed a significant

improvement in bench press (4.2 per cent) and squat exercise (9.9 per cent) performance. The placebo group showed no change.

The peak power of the velvet antler group reduced only 0.5 per cent during the anaerobic trials, compared with 3.2 per cent reduction in the placebos. Their average power reduced by 2.1 per cent compared with 5 per cent. They were also about 60 per cent quicker in reaching peak power.

A particularly interesting result was the effect of velvet antler on aerobic capacity. In absolute terms and relative to body weight, it increased significantly – 9.8 per cent and 9.4 per cent respectively. There was no change in the placebo group. Additionally, during a maximal treadmill test, most subjects in the velvet antler group had a reduced heart response of 5 to 8 beats per minute.

Other benefits of velvet antler were reduced muscle damage and a dramatic improvement in the rate of repair of any muscle damage that did occur. Muscle damage was measured by blood levels of creatine kinase (CK). CK is an enzyme found in cells which helps them source energy during exercise. During anaerobic exercise, some muscle cells break open and their contents find their way into the bloodstream. A rise in CK levels in the blood

indicates that muscle damage has occurred, or is occurring. In the velvet antler group, CK levels were 25 per cent lower than the baseline, compared with 11 per cent with the placebos. Two days later, CK levels in the experimental group were 45 per cent below the baseline.

A side finding of this study was that velvet antler may have a potential for the prevention of osteoporosis. The placebo group appeared to lose bone density during the study, which indicated they were over-training. The experimental group retained bone density.

Dr. Broeder says that all the results are very significant differences, especially for athletes who were already extremely fit and training at a high level. Although it was a double-blind study, the ones taking velvet antler knew within two or three weeks that they were taking something really different.

According to Dr. Broeder, more studies are needed to confirm these benefits in athletes and average adults. He is particularly interested in seeing whether velvet antler could help reduce weight and risks of cardiovascular diseases among middle-aged “couch potatoes” and non-athletes.

[Source: NZ The Deer Farmer – April 2004]

## 5. Events Calendar

Here is a list of upcoming events of interest to deer, elk, and reindeer farmers. We have expanded these listings to include events that offer marketing opportunities for the industry.

**Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association** will hold its 122<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting on **October 21 to 24, 2004** at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel at Pittsburg, PA. For more, please see <http://www.pavma.org>

**Maryland Veterinary Medical Association** will hold their fall conference at the Holiday

Inn in Timonium, MD on November 10-11, 2004. Phone 410-931-3332.

**Saskatchewan Association of Veterinary Technologists (SAVT)** will hold their 20<sup>th</sup> annual general meeting and conference in Saskatoon, SK (Radisson Hotel and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine) on **November 12 to 14, 2004**. For more

information, call 1-866-811-7288, email [savt@savt.ca](mailto:savt@savt.ca) or visit <http://www.savt.ca>

**North American Veterinary Conference (NAVC) and the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA)** will hold an annual meeting in Orlando, FL on **January 8 to 12, 2005**. Contact them at [info@tnavc.org](mailto:info@tnavc.org) or visit <http://www.navconline.com>

**Minnesota Elk Breeders Association Annual Conference** will be held **January 15, 2005** at the Marriott, Rochester, Minnesota USA. For more information, please e-mail [info@mneba.org](mailto:info@mneba.org)

**Missouri Veterinary Medical Association Annual Convention** will be held on **January 21 to 23, 2005**. For more information phone 573-636-8612 or e-mail [mvma@mvma.us](mailto:mvma@mvma.us)

**Farm Direct Marketing Initiative** will hold a provincial conference for farm direct marketers and ag tourism operators in Alberta (Canada). The conference will be held on **January 24-26, 2004** at the Red Deer Lodge in Red Deer, Alberta. For more information, or to be put on a mailing list, please call 780-679-1361.

**Michigan Veterinary Conference** will be held at the Lansing Center and Radisson Hotel on **January 27 to 30, 2005**. Phone 517-347-4710 or visit <http://www.michvma.org>

**Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA)** will hold their *Better Medicine, Better Life* conference in Toronto, ON on **January 27 to 29, 2005**. For more information, visit <http://www.ovma.org>

**Indiana Veterinary Medical Association (INVMA)** will hold their annual meeting in Indianapolis on **January 28 to 30, 2005**. For more information, visit <http://www.invma.org>

**Iowa Elk Breeders Association Annual Convention** will be held on **January 29, 2005** at the Jester Park Lodge, Granger, Iowa. For more information call 641-782-2903 or visit <http://www.iowaelkbreeders.org>

**Virginia Veterinary Medical Association** will hold their annual general meeting in Roanoke, Virginia on **February 3 to 5, 2005**. For more information, visit <http://www.vvma.org/conference.htm>

**Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT)** will hold their 27<sup>th</sup> annual conference and trade show in London, ON (London Convention Centre and Hilton) on **February 17 to 19, 2005**. For more information, contact them at [events@oavt.org](mailto:events@oavt.org) or visit <http://www.oavt.org>

**Ohio Veterinary Medical Association** will hold its annual conference on **February 24 to 27, 2005**. For more information, see <http://www.mvcinfo.org>

**New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association** will hold their annual meeting in Florham Park, NJ (Hamilton Park Conference Centre) on **March 4 to 6, 2005**. For more information, visit <http://www.njvma.org/public/events/index.asp>

**Global Pet Expo**, one of the world's largest pet products trade shows, will be held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL on **March 13 to 15, 2005**. For more information see <http://www.globalpetexpo.org>

**Canadian Veterinary Medical Association** will hold their annual convention in Victoria, BC on **July 13 to 16, 2005**. For more information, visit <http://www.cvma-acmv.org/>

## 6. Subscription Services

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## 7. Contact Information

We are always looking for articles and news about deer, elk, and reindeer farming to publish in this newsletter. E-mail, fax, or mail your ideas and articles to the Editor (see information below).

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## Notes