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**BRITISH DEER FARMS
& PARKS ASSOCIATION**

Handbook 2018

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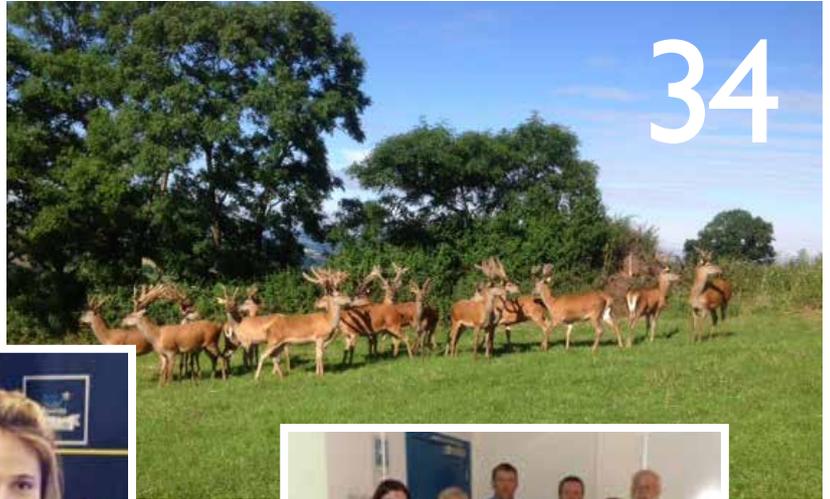
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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



The BDFPA is 40 years old this year which is quite an achievement and the industry is in one of the strongest places it has been within the last 40 years.

I have now been in the position of Chairman for about 18 months and there have been some major changes in that time.

For those of you that don't know me I am sure you will have heard I have now left Woburn to go and set up and manage a new deer farm on the East Sussex, Kent border. Martin Harwood has taken over from me at Woburn and I wish him all the best going forward.

There have also been changes within the Association, with new council members coming on board and some old faces stepping down. I would like to thank all the council members who are stepping down for all their hard work and time they have given.

I think as Chairman I didn't quite realise how much time this role would take! I would like to thank my council for all the work they do to keep things moving forward.

I hope as members you have also noticed some changes throughout the last year with hopefully more open days and focus days being held across the country and training courses being developed to cover a large range to deer management topics. Thanks to everyone who has hosted an open day or training day.

One major change happening this year is the trial of holding a summer conference rather than in the autumn to try and encourage more people to attend with a simpler more relaxed feel. The conference this year will be held in the south of England in July.

As I am sure you all will have seen, heard, or experienced, there is again an increase in people coming into the deer industry, be that in a farmed capacity or a park set up. This is extremely exciting and encouraging for the industry, I hope you all feel the excitement of being involved in an industry which is on the up and one in which you can have such an influence, albeit slightly frustrating at times when there is not enough stock available for all those who want it! I hope that with this increase, we as an Association can grow with it to help support the industry as the BDFPA has done for the last 40 years.

I hope that with the increased popularity of deer farming we as an industry can regulate ourselves and manage the markets so as not to cause us to implode with ridiculous prices for stock and in industry narrow mindedness. I think now is a time to try and modernise and move forward with fresh ideas and embrace anything that could benefit our industry.

With the new summer conference in the early stages of planning we are also planning to hold a 40th Anniversary celebration dinner in London in the autumn to celebrate the past 40 years of the BDFPA. I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend both the conference and then the dinner as well.

I will be attending as many of the open days as I can so I hope I will see you all at some point over my final year as Chairman.

OPINION

DEER FARMING IN EUROPE

I have been very fortunate in my deer farming career to have worked and travelled extensively in many countries around the world, I have visited some wonderful places, met great people, I have seen the good, bad and ugly side of deer management.

In this article, I want to share my thoughts on how I see the current situation with deer farming in Europe. I recently sat for up to 9 hours in FEDFA meeting discussing a new constitution, and exploring how deer farming can be expanded in Europe. There were 10 countries represented and by the end of the day we really were no further forward.

It was very clear that cultural differences and historical issues were playing a big part in decision making, it was also very clear the delegates perspective was different.

Hunting is a big part of what they do, so you have two lobby groups, hunters and farmers, some are doing both. The hunters do not want to commercialize and intensively farm deer, they want to keep them as a truly wild animal, the farmers want more intensification, which creates divisions and conflict. One of the talking points at the meeting was how Europe expands its deer industry to meet the demand for venison and to become less reliant on New Zealand imports. Most of the farms I have visited are of small scale selling locally, with no national structure to their industry, basically people doing their own thing. The question I ask is how do you convince cattle and sheep farmers all over Europe to keep deer when there is no certainty of route to market for their product, it is very much a cottage industry.

In the UK the deer farming industry is well ahead of our European friends, with farming cooperatives, designated slaughter houses, quality assurance schemes, focus days, we also have embraced management techniques from NZ, whether it be fencing, genetics, feeding or pasture improvements. Generally speaking it is not happening in Europe. Is there a case for closer ties with training and marketing for example, is it something the deer industry in the UK would want, or do we have enough problems of our own? So, can these countries with all their cultural differences pull together to meet the boom in demand for venison? Not from the evidence so far. The Federation of European Deer Farmers Association (FEDFA) has two meetings per year. The

spring meeting discusses topical issues, policy making, while the autumn meeting is generally focused on farm visits. Having been to several meetings over the years I do get the feeling it is just a talking shop then everyone goes home and does their own thing, but you could take the view that at least we are all talking to each other!!

My experience of the Eastern bloc countries is more limited. I have worked in Latvia, Hungary and Russia and dealt with clients in Lithuania. The concept of farming deer is not new for meat or hunting, but it tends to be small scale ranch style management with hunting being a big part of what they do.

There are some people now farming deer as we know it, but again they are doing their own thing with no national structure. The farm where I worked in Latvia was trying to embrace our management techniques with a view to selling venison products through their own outlets in Riga and live sales to Russia but one of the problems they faced were the brutal winters and lack of skilled staff.

Hungary has some of the finest red deer in the world, big bodies, big antlers but it is all about hunting. They are producing a lot of low priced venison, supplying the game trade, but this can be of mixed quality achieving low returns.

There is one deer farm not only producing trophies, but quality farmed venison. They are marketing through high quality restaurants in Budapest and convincing chefs that their consistency of product deserves a higher price, in some cases 3 times the value of wild venison. They envisage they will need 300 carcasses per year, but this is a drop in the ocean to what is required. Legislation, strong hunting lobby, lack of knowledge and people to work on deer farms is slowing progress and there is also a trend to keep just enough deer to comply with EU subsidies.

I have recently had an enquiry from a Russian land owner who wants to set up a 2000 hind venison farm. He tells me that the demand for meat in Russia is rising, mostly pork and chicken, but he believes venison will be the next big thing and wants to be in at the start of large scale farmed venison sales into their biggest cities. For him and his staff it is a very big learning curve to get the efficiencies and good practices to make it profitable. It seems to me that

OPINION DEER FARMING IN EUROPE *continued...*

Russia has the potential to become a very big player in venison production, I know over the past few years that a lot of red deer have been exported from all over Europe into the country (some of these no doubt go into hunting estates), but farmed venison is on their radar and they seem to have the finances and demand to make it work.

The discussion point at the FEDFA meeting was how does Europe produce more farmed venison? Well the easy answer to that is have more deer farms! Until there is a more structured approach, the industry will not grow at the pace needed to supply the demand.

Rules and regulations coming out of Brussels have a big part to play with every country having their own interpretations, which makes it very difficult to have a European wide strategy.

On a side note there have been discussions on whether velvetting should take place in Europe. This is certainly going to cause further division, with some countries already planning velvet production and others strongly opposed.

I am not so involved in the UK deer farming industry as I used to be, but it is good to reflect and look from the outside, and from what I am seeing it is encouraging. In the 80s and 90s the industry grew quickly, but it was based on a lot of money from investors, who saw a new way to make their fortunes but of course the reality set in and it all came crumbling down.

Today there seems to be a stronger foundation with more realistic expectations, potential deer farmers have knowledge to tap into, industry training, routes to market and the certainty of selling their product at realistic prices.

Of course there are always problems, the uncertainty of leaving the European union, the lack of breeding hinds, staying ahead of changing consumers eating habits, but I think there are good signs in the UK deer farming industry and with some very good young people involved I see it continuing to grow at a sensible pace.

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GRANT FUNDING

WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

The UK government currently has in excess of £200 million allocated to various rural and business grant funds. The funding is part of a strategic investment of £3.5 billion into rural economies by 2020 under the Rural Development Program for England (RDPE). All projects agreed before the UK leaves the EU will be guaranteed for their lifetime – providing stability and certainty while future support for farmers and rural communities is developed.

Generally grants are available for projects that increase business output by utilising technologies such as, for example, Electronic Identification Systems (EID) and direct drills. Projects that generate new jobs and support the growth of rural business are also likely to be eligible for grant funding.

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP MID-TIER

Offers annual grants over 5 years for environmental and wildlife features such as in field plots and margins of pollen and nectar, winter bird food and arable reversion attracting payments of around £200/ac. Legume and herb rich swards, a productive grass ley, pays £125/ac and can work well within a rotation.

Capital grants are also available for tracks at £33/m, concreting £27/m², roofing handling systems, livestock gathering areas and silage stores £62/m². Other capital items within in the scheme are: water piping, water troughs and hardcore bases for troughs and feeders, stock fencing and permanent electric fencing, wooden field gates, hedge row and tree planting to name a few.

Standalone capital grants are also available in areas targeted for the reduction of water pollution from agriculture. One off grants of up to £10,000 can be achieved for concreting, roofing and creating farm tracks.

LEADER

Grants between £5,000 - £180,000* up to 40% of project costs aimed at:

Increasing Farm Productivity

Animal welfare is a priority and full handling systems including buildings, crushes, and EID equipment are eligible as are direct drills, robotic milkers etc.

Farm Diversification

Renovation of farm buildings and conversions to other uses such as cafés, crèches and accommodation.

LEADER grants are also available for rural tourism, increasing forest productivity and the provision of rural services.

*Grant amounts vary according to business location

RDPE GROWTH PROGRAMME

Provides funding for projects in England which create jobs and growth in the rural economy. Under the RDPE Growth Programme, there are currently calls for projects open for: business development, food processing and rural tourism infrastructure. The growth program is aimed at larger grants of between £35k and £1m at a 40% grant rate making the smallest project size £87,500.

Whilst grant funding should not be relied upon to keep a business afloat it does have a place and can be useful and worthwhile if a business is considering a project that would be eligible and attract funds.

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AN EVALUATION OF THE FARMED DEER SECTOR IN THE UK, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE NEED FOR A MORE STRUCTURED MARKETING APPROACH



Demand for venison in the UK is growing rapidly and as a result there are many new farms and parks being set up to cater for this increased interest. There is no doubt that the UK industry needs to expand but unmanaged expansion may create more problems than it solves. It is important that the product produced is marketed as a premium product rather than simply sold on the wild game market, returns from which do not justify the extra costs involved in the production of a farmed product. A good example of an integrated marketing chain getting it right is First Venison but looking at the country as a whole the situation does not appear to be as rosy. Daisy Miles is a graduate surveyor at Henry H Bletsoe and son, based in Northamptonshire and for her BSc dissertation she chose to look at venison marketing in the UK. Here is her summary of what she found out.

Having spent the past 3 years studying Rural Enterprise and Land Management at Harper Adams University, I wanted to choose an interesting and relatively new topic area to investigate, when it came to finding a topic for my fourth year honours research project. Many of my peers chose subject areas which they were familiar with, and directly related to rural surveying. However, my knowledge and understanding of the Deer industry, in particular the farmed sector was almost non-existent. It could be argued that a lack of initial understanding was a disadvantage to my work, however I found myself fully immersed and genuinely interested in the subject as soon as I started my research, and thoroughly believe it gave strength to my findings having no biased attitude towards what I was researching.

Growing up in a small village in South Dorset, I had the opportunity to accompany the deer stalker on the Estate on several occasions which inspired my interest in the subject generally. When speaking to Ian Damms of the BDFPA, I was enthused by the idea of looking at the farmed sector in the UK, particularly due to the ever-increasing demand for the farmed product. Through initial background reading and reviewing other people's research and literature, a number of key issues/areas of contention were identified. The gaps found as a result of the literature review formed the basis of my research of which there were four key objectives;

Identify if farmed venison producers are disadvantaged in the current market.

Identify if farmers are acquiring premiums for their products. Identify how venison producers currently market their products and if marketing strategies are used.

Evaluate views given by farmers on how they feel the industry needs to move forward in future to support producers.

Data collection took the form of semi-structured telephone interviews due to time constraints and the need for a geographical range of participants. Five deer farmers agreed to be a part of the study and were interviewed, providing invaluable contributions to my research for which I am very grateful. The results from interviews were then analysed using tables and subsequently coding themes to be able to evaluate the findings.

The findings directly achieved each objective and the research concluded that there are disadvantages to producers in the market. Barriers for new entrants and existing farmers were identified. A key disadvantage identified was the challenge of securing a tenancy long enough to justify investment into deer farming. It was also suggested that producers could disadvantage themselves indirectly in future if prices are set too high.

Quality and consistency were running themes throughout each interview response, and it was identified that producers are acquiring premiums, with strong belief in the farmed product. It was concluded that business performance relies heavily on finding the right market, and the strength that reputation and quality provides.

Furthermore, findings suggested that the industry has a fragmented marketing structure, as there was little unity among producers and that almost all had no access to, or did not follow industry guidance.

Attitudes towards the future identified the need to move forward in a proactive manner. New entrants were considered key to the future, along with emphasis on the need for larger farms in order to increase viability. Creating a price resistant product was also considered important. Retailer schemes were deemed beneficial for the future with the need to maintain control of the sector. Overall the conclusions suggested that a segregated industry is not sustainable and that working as a collective would be advantageous.

Findings from farmer interviews provided in depth responses from which overall industry attitudes were discussed. However, interviewing producers only provided one perspective of the industry. To further the research already undertaken, views and opinions of a stakeholder at the other end of the supply chain was seen as a good way to test findings. Therefore, supermarket retailers were contacted. Out of the five supermarkets contacted only one was willing to participate, providing an interesting point regarding earlier concerns of producers over trust and control from large retailers.

The interview identified that everything the supermarket buys is supplied by UK farmers, and the only time venison is bought from New Zealand is when the UK supply is out of season. The buyer also commented on the work they are doing with UK farmers to lengthen the UK season; identifying the effort to keep British venison on the supermarket shelf for as long as possible.

The retailer was asked if they believed a premium price was paid for the products. The response suggested they believed they were paying premiums for the meat they are buying, positively correlating with findings from producer interviews. However, an interesting point was raised regarding benchmarking, and the lack of resources within the industry to compare figures. It was highlighted that other sectors of the agricultural industry have organisations such as EBLEX and AHDB, which provide weekly figures and reports to benchmark from. The fact that buyers at the other end of the supply chain have no structured organisation to guide them, and that producers have identified there is a lack of industry guidance, indicates the industry is missing opportunities to strengthen the supply chain, and therefore effectively secure their place in the UK meat

market. These findings suggested that the deer industry may be in need of an industry organisation on a smaller scale but of similar structure to that of EBLEX or AHDB. Concluding comments from the supermarket identified the need for more farmers to enter supermarket schemes to widen supplies. It is clear the retail market has a high demand, and schemes provide farmers with a secure market and price.

Overall, research has identified the need for more industry guidance which could provide producers and retailers with effective advice and resources to create structured marketing strategies and benchmark performance. This could potentially reduce concerns that stake holders have, and provide a more secure market place for existing farmers and new entrants.

Although this study was undertaken as part of an honours research project and may not have a strong weighting in terms of credible research, some significant points have been identified which if addressed could have largely positive impacts on the industry as a whole, provided there is unity and proactive attitudes amongst producers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants involved in my study and for the support and guidance that Ian Damms has given throughout the whole process.

Suggestions for further research included investigating the scope for a new organisation specifically targeting marketing, and looking into the scope for more supermarket led schemes for deer farmers.



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*All CIC quotes are not official.

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CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS: WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ON DEER FARMS?

Dr Beth Wells

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My main research interests at Moredun revolve around transmission and control of the parasite *Cryptosporidium parvum* on cattle farms and in the environment. This includes wildlife and water, particularly water supplies, as *C. parvum* is zoonotic and can cause serious disease in young children, elderly people, or anyone who is immune-compromised such as those receiving cancer therapy. The environmental stage of this parasite is a microscopic, hard shelled “oocyst” or egg, which is abundant in the environment and well adapted to survival in our ever increasingly damp and mild climate in the UK. It can withstand temperatures up to 60°C and down to -20°C, but is susceptible to desiccation, freeze/thaw cycles and sunlight – all of which have been in short supply over the last few years!

Both cattle and deer farmers in the UK report increasing problems with clinical disease due to cryptosporidiosis in young calves, which are the most susceptible to infection, where clinical signs include profuse watery scour, loss of appetite, hunched stance and obvious pain, reluctance to move, dehydration and sometimes death in severe cases. Currently there is no vaccine to prevent disease in cattle or deer and only one licensed preventative / treatment for cattle, Halocur. Although reducing scouring and oocyst shedding in infected calves, this product is difficult to administer as it has to be given orally for 7 days and is highly expensive. There are currently no licensed products to help deer farmers control cryptosporidiosis outbreaks in deer calves, which currently can be responsible for high death rates in the first few weeks of life on infected farms.

Having been involved in several projects looking at *Cryptosporidium* prevalence in wild deer and hearing of the serious problems some deer farmers were encountering with this disease, I have become increasingly interested in looking at infections within deer farms. I was therefore, delighted to be invited to speak at the BDFPA conference at Kinloch Rannoch in October this year and took the opportunity to look at all the information and advice we have available for cattle farmers and compare this to the management employed on deer farms in the UK. Of course I very quickly realised that most of the cattle

guidelines were just not applicable to the deer farming system. We see most cryptosporidiosis problems in spring calving suckler herds and dairy herds that calf indoors and generally problems encountered due to cryptosporidiosis in outdoor calving herds are quite rare in cattle. As all deer calf outdoors, we have a big difference already and a situation where many of our guidelines devised for cattle were of no benefit whatsoever!

So decision made – I went to the conference on a fact finding mission and used the expertise and experience of the deer farmers present to have lengthy discussions, where I attempted to marry the parasite information we have gained through research and experience in cattle herds, with their knowledge and experience of the practicalities of farmed deer management, to produce some management strategies for control. It was great to meet you all there and I was very pleased to be asked, after the event, to compile an article for BDFPA’s 2018 Handbook, as this gave me an opportunity to pull all of this newly gained, and hopefully useful, information together. For the rest of this article, I will outline what we discussed and the outcomes of our combined thinking.

THE PARASITE CRYPTOSPORIDIUM

The biology and lifecycle of *Cryptosporidium* make this a difficult parasite to control (see Fig 1)

Young livestock are prone to infection before they have the chance to build up a solid immunity to the parasite

Only a very low infectious dose of parasite is required to cause infection in a susceptible calf – as low as 10 oocysts

Once infected, a calf can produce literally billions of oocysts, which in turn can infect all other susceptible calves in the herd

The lifecycle can complete very quickly (2-5 days) therefore parasite numbers increase rapidly during an outbreak

Once ingested by a calf, the parasite readily and rapidly becomes infective and starts to multiply

The route of infection is a faecal / oral one and therefore this is the point which needs to be targeted in any control programme.

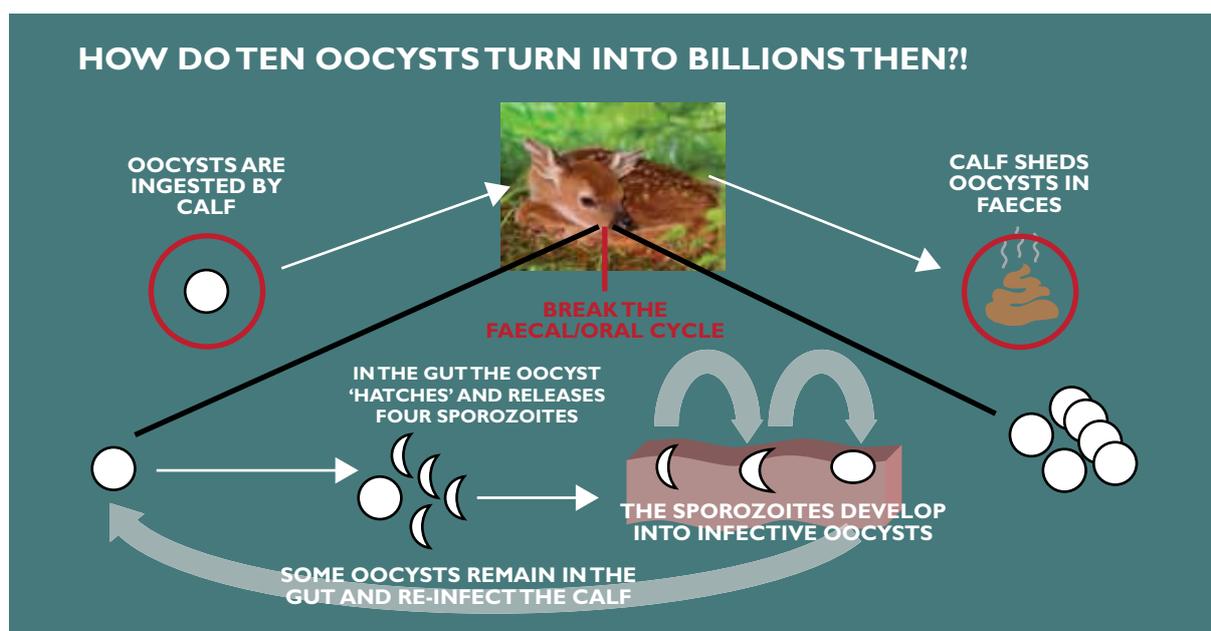


FIGURE 1 Cryptosporidium lifecycle

CRYPTOSPORIDIUM PARVUM

The species of *Cryptosporidium* which causes disease in young calves is known as *Cryptosporidium parvum* (also transmissible to humans) and although the main reservoir of this parasite is neonatal (or very young) cattle, we are now beginning to build up a picture of how this parasite is transmitted. *C. parvum*, unlike many other species of *Cryptosporidium*, is not host specific meaning that it can infect, and cause disease, in many species including deer, cattle, sheep, humans, goats etc. This means that it has a lot of hosts it can use to multiply itself in, which is another reason as to why it is difficult to control. We have recently have isolated significant amounts of *C. parvum* in samples from geese, rabbits, wild red and roe deer and voles, as well as from water supplies to farm fields and buildings. As our detection methods have improved in sensitivity, we now commonly isolate *C. parvum* from samples derived from adult cattle, deer and sheep, whereas previously, it was thought that infection spread only from calf to calf. This suggests that the adult livestock may be responsible for maintaining infection between calving's on pasture.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is key when young livestock start scouring, as the treatment given will depend on this. For example, *C. parvum* is commonly diagnosed as a co-infection with rotavirus, coronavirus or *E. coli* infections. Although there is no useful treatment for crypto, by controlling the pathogens that can be controlled, such as antibiotics for *E. coli* or preventing rota and corona virus using vaccines, the effects of *C. parvum* infection will not be as severe.

COLOSTRUM: FLUID, FOOD AND ANTIBODIES ALL IN ONE!

At birth all mammals have poorly developed immune systems and rely on maternal antibodies in colostrum to provide protection against pathogens

It is estimated up to 50% of dairy calves in the UK do not get enough colostrum for maximum disease protection

The best colostrum is that from the dam, who will have antibody protection for all pathogens that are present on your farm

The 3 Q's of Colostrum:

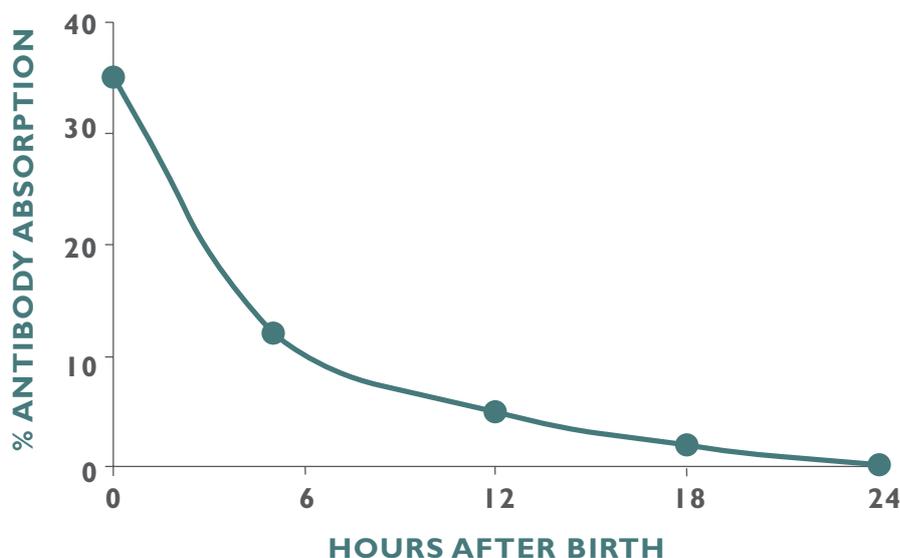
Quickness: As soon as possible (within 1-6 hours) after birth or the calf gut loses the ability to absorb antibodies from the dam's colostrum (see Fig 2).

Quality: This differs between animals and generally first calvers will have lower quality colostrum than in subsequent calvings. Colostrum quality can be improved by feeding high protein rumen by-pass rations near calving.

Quantity: As a guide, 10% of bodyweight should be consumed as a first feed.

FIGURE 2

The ability of the calf gut to absorb colostrum from the dam decreases rapidly after birth



POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONTROL OF CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS ON DEER FARMS ARE BASED ON:

MAXIMISING THE INTAKE AND ABSORPTION OF SPECIFIC ANTIBODIES BY THE NEW-BORN CALF AGAINST *C. PARVUM* VIA ITS DAM'S COLOSTRUM.

REDUCING THE ENVIRONMENTAL LOADING OF THE PARASITE IN CALVING AREAS AS LOW AS POSSIBLE.

INTRODUCING THE CALF TO LOW PARASITE NUMBERS FOR THE FIRST 2/3 WEEKS OF LIFE UNTIL THEY HAVE DEVELOPED A SOLID IMMUNITY TO CRYPTO OF THEIR OWN.

The suggestions below are all aimed at achieving the points above. Not all suggestions will either suit, or be required on all farms, as there is not a one size fits all answer to crypto control on farms. However, some suggestions include:

Can you use preventative vaccines if you have other scour causing pathogens of your farm such as the rotavirus/coronavirus/ *E. coli* vaccine for dams during pregnancy?

Dam nutrition pre-calving: For high quality colostrum, consult an animal nutritionist to carry out forage analysis and potential mineral / protein supplementation if required

Age group calves: To within a week if possible, as older calves may shed oocysts even if they are not showing clinical signs, which can cause disease in new-born calves. Remove older calves from paddocks where young are being born or sort hinds into calving groups

Keep all calving hinds, especially first calvers at low stocking densities at calving: To reduce environmental contamination particularly in young hinds where colostrum quality and mothering ability may be lower

Break the oral / faecal cycle with good pasture hygiene during calving: Clean grazing for calves if possible by rotation, including the use of electric fencing which can be moved forward every few days to provide clean, cover for new-borns on ground that calves have not been born on recently. This will help reduce oocyst contamination where new-borns are first lying

Use drier fields / drain fields for calving if possible: crypto oocysts like damp, humid areas of ground and will lose infectivity if dried out

Do not co-graze or even cross-graze deer with cattle especially if they have calves at foot or sheep with lambs, if at all possible

Good biosecurity: Don't buy in what you don't have. Quarantine and test any bought in animals before mixing with your resident herd, including stags

Work with your vet to produce a herd health plan tailored for your own farm and management. This takes the stress out of decisions around calving time when you are even busier than usual

Remember many of these strategies will control many pathogens, not just crypto so make good health planning sense.

THE FUTURE

Current research into solutions for cryptosporidiosis in livestock is making progress with emphasis on potential new treatments and vaccines. Other areas of work include investigating the relative importance of dam to calf transmission of *C. parvum* and genotyping field isolates of *C. parvum* to investigate virulence factors as we know some strains of *C. parvum* are more virulent than others. Going forward, I am keen to work with deer farmers with cryptosporidiosis problems and would welcome contact from anyone in this situation, to discuss how we could help.

THE BDFPA PARK VENISON QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME



Photo courtesy of Woburn Estate

After several years in development the BDFPA are pleased to launch the Park Venison Assurance Scheme. Growth in the demand for venison from both farmed and wild sources continues to outstrip supply with no sign of peak demand being reached. The BDFPA has built on their reputation for supporting high quality production of Farmed & Park Venison to reach a unique agreement with a leading venison processor and retailer to supply Park Venison through their retail outlets.

While legally classified as 'wild,' Park Deer can be defined as follows:

Park Deer - definition

- Extensive enclosed herd.
- Whole herd set stocked.
- Limited animal health inputs and winter feeding.
- Deer numbers managed by culling.
- Culling managed by trained hunter.
- Must adhere to statutory close seasons for respective species.
- Wild Game Handling facility.
- Venison usually sold as wild game through game dealer or direct to a processor.

In the same way that Farmed Deer can be assured under the Quality Assured Farmed Venison Scheme, the BDFPA in collaboration with specialists in deer management, food safety, hygiene, animal welfare and management have developed an Assurance Scheme for Park Venison.

Being an approved member of the BDFPA Deer Park Assurance scheme gives your customers the reassurance that your venison is produced to an industry recognised Code of Best Practice and your policies and procedures are reviewed and by Acoura Certification Ltd, an independent professional body.

Membership of the BDFPA Deer Park Quality Assurance Scheme:

- Keeps you up to date with the latest regulatory requirements.
- Ensures that you are following current Best Practice with your herds and larders
- Demonstrates to your customers that you are producing a quality product produced to a recognised standard
- Helps to demonstrate due diligence in supplying safe food into the human food chain

The BDFPA has contracted out the inspection and certification work for their schemes to a specialist independent third party, Acoura Certification. **They can be contacted by email at info@acoura.com by telephone on 0131 335 6603 or by post at 6 Redheughs Rigg, Edinburgh. EH12 9DQ**

To become an approved member of the Park Venison Assurance Scheme contact either the BDFPA or Acoura certification Ltd for an Application Form. Submit the completed Application Form, together with payment, to the BDFPA.

Applicants will then be sent a 'self assessment' checklist of documents, policies and records that must be submitted to Acoura Certification Ltd. Ideally, these should be submitted electronically, but hard copies are acceptable. However, we would strongly advise only to send copies and not original documents.

Once everything has been submitted, they will be reviewed by Acoura Certification Ltd, and they should allow the Applicant to demonstrate that they meet with the requirement of the scheme. If there are any 'gaps' the applicant will be advised of these and requested to submit additional documents or records.

Once Acoura are satisfied that the applicant is meeting the standards, then 'approved' status is granted, and a certificate issued, and the member and the BDFPA advised.

At this stage the scheme does not require a site inspection. The assessment process is a 'desk top' exercise review only. As the scheme evolves then an inspection of the Park's facilities may be included as part of the certification process, but members will be advised of this well in advance of this being introduced.

Membership renewal and the assessment process will be annual, with members advised when their renewal and assessment is due.

Park owners who wish to join the scheme should contact either the BDFPA or Acoura for an application form and copy of the standards. On receipt of the completed application form and payment you will be sent a 'self assessment' checklist.

Further information about the scheme and contact details can be found on the BDFPA and Acoura websites
www.bdfpa.org/qa-schemes
www.acoura.com/sectors/agriculture-and-environment/environment-and-game/bdfpa

Alternatively, if you would like more information or to discuss any elements of the scheme you can contact the BDFPA or Acoura via the email links below.

Contact us:

Acoura Email info@acoura.com
BDFPA Email info@bdfpa.org

SKY PARK FARM

A NEW DEER FARM, ONE YEAR ON..



As I sit here writing this article, I reflect on what a manic year it has been for us and how it has flown by. Occasionally I look through the photos of the farm on my laptop to remind myself just how far we have come and what we have achieved in such a relatively short space of time. It has been a mammoth task transforming the farm in a matter of months from a derelict mess to a tidy deer farm that will hopefully grow profitable deer.

This article was written for two reasons, firstly to introduce Sky Park Farm and secondly and more importantly a simple collection of some of my thoughts and observations, over the last year, for those embarking on setting up a new deer farm. I hope it may be of some use for the newcomer to this industry.

Back in September we had our BDFPA open day at Sky Park Farm, more or less a year to the day after we first started work on the newly acquired land. The day was a great success for us and I think those that attended all took something away from the day. Whether it was the talk from Jonathan Holmes (of Lordington Park Agronomy) on the fundamental and fascinating principles of grassland management or the deer fencing lecture and practical demonstration in the afternoon.

When we took the farm on, just over a year ago now, it was one of the most rubbish ridden, untidy, run down and abused pieces of land I think I have probably ever seen. Various members of the BDFPA have seen it from the beginning and can attest to my completely honest and non-exaggerated description of the farm. It truly was a state, with a very chequered history. The couple of photos here may hopefully give the reader a little insight into the task we were faced with for a large part of the first four months. This type of undergrowth and rubbish was endemic everywhere.

The rubbish was not just reserved to a few locations in the farm yard. It extended beyond the farm buildings and yards throughout the area of open woodland and most of the edges of the grass land surrounding the main farm yard. I deliberately use the term 'grass land' as the word 'pasture' may conjure an image of a lush green meadow. This is far too refined a description for what was growing there. In places the grassland looked similar to a disused brownfield site, awaiting a new lease of life; full of noxious weeds, brambles and rubbish.

The previous owners had run a small herd of Beef Cattle on a very low input system. The grassland management had been non-existent for however many years as the photo left shows. However; after investigating, with the help of Lordington Park Agronomy, it seemed all the bare bones of what was required to grow good grass was still there.

The stock fencing to contain the cattle was made up of 7 strands of barbed wire and it was everywhere. It wasn't just nailed to fence posts but to most trees along all the boundaries as well as trees that must have formed internal fences at some point in history as there was evidence of wire poking out everywhere. The photo left shows the quality and extent of the 'fencing.' This poor Oak had 14 strands of barbed wire attached to it.

One of the first jobs in the process of making the farm ready to receive deer, (3.5 months after starting work,) was clearing back the vegetation to find the old fences and the boundaries. However, in order to even get close to the fence lines with machinery, meant most of the tree lines and hedgerows around the field perimeters needed high pruning. There were strips around the perimeter and under the large individual Oak trees in excess of 20 metres wide which had never seen a flail mower or chain harrows, as the branches were simply too low to drive under. High pruning allowed us to get diggers and tractors in under the newly raised crowns of the trees, to flail back vegetation, rip out fences, dig ditches and other ground preparation.

I find the most efficient method of high pruning on large jobs, having done a lot as part of my previous business, is to use a telehandler and cage. A good driver can put the saw operator in the cage exactly where he needs to be with everything still out of harm's way when the limbs start falling.

I find it best to follow the telehandler with a tracked chipper and chainsaw to clear the brush, snedding out all the cord wood and anything too big for the chipper. Everything else gets wound through the chipper and fired into the base of the hedgerows, leaving no mess. Any other way is slow especially if relying on loading and moving the brush or burning to dispose of it, which leaves scars all over the landscape or ruts in the ground, from ferrying it backward and forward.

High pruning is also key to allow refencing, whether it is stock fencing for sheep or cattle or deer fencing. It is even more important for deer fencing as the mast of the post driver required to punch a 3.6m strainer post into the ground may be 5metres high or thereabouts. Having low branches will make erecting deer fencing slow going for yourself or the contractor. Do make sure if you are doing the high pruning yourself to ask the contractor what height he requires it cleared to.

Once we had high pruned we could get in to flail boundaries back, clear scrub and cut up old fallen trees. It is vital to knock vegetation right back before fencing a field. Over time it is amazing how hedges and scrub creep out to fill the unmanageable and awkward voids between fences and hedges. To the extent where over the years on most farms a considerable amount of potential grazing ground could be lost. The opposite argument to all this clearing is that a certain amount of cover is essential for shade and shelter, two key requirements for deer. It helps to think about the movement of the sun through the day when you design your paddocks to make sure that each potential new paddock will have areas of shade from the existing trees.



After we had cleared the vegetation we were able to remove the old fences. There was a lot of them, all with 7 strands of barbed wire each. I have removed many thousands of metres of old fence and there are few ways to do it neatly, easily and safely that do not end up in a huge bird's nest tangle of wire. Whether it is new or old, barbed wire is unpleasant to work with at the best of times, so an efficient method of tidying up old fences is essential. Most farmers get a grab on a telehandler and just rip it out, posts and all. This means staples ping everywhere all over the fields and you end up with a huge tangle of net, wire and posts.

I use a hydraulic auger motor mounted on a 3t Digger with a homemade conical steel cotton reel type of device mounted on it. Using a pair of staple pullers and a bucket, all the staples can be removed and the wire laid on the floor ready for winding up. The ends are then all tied to the auger reel and simply wound in producing a very neat and tight roll of barbed wire ready to dispose of. We wound in 7 strands of barbed wire, each about 300metres long all at once in the space of about 3 or 4 minutes. A few hits with a sledge hammer or lever with a crowbar and the coil slides off the reel remaining intact, ready for disposal.

Whilst fences are down it is a great opportunity to do any jobs which may not have been done properly for years. Sometimes ditches get fenced out and forgotten about. This is a great time to dig them out and easily move any spoil across the fields. It may be necessary to put short lengths of pipe in the ditch in key places, for example where a fence crosses it, and you don't want to have a water gate. Or a new bridge where a race will cross it, leading to another field. When it comes to erecting new deer fences, think very carefully about where they will be and the long-term management of that ditch you have just cleared. Will it be within a deer paddock, in which case will the deer be poaching and paddling in it? Is it fenced out but still accessible? Can it be cleared from the neighbour's side? These are all things to think about, before erecting a new deer fence.

When it comes to the actual fencing, hopefully by clearing the vegetation you can see the exact lines, changes of angle and metreaages of the deer fence and the materials required. Now is the time to blade any fence lines with a digger, to smooth out any lumps, bumps or holes. Deer netting can be made to bend up and down however excessively sharp changes of angle are difficult to follow. If possible all major changes in angles of the ground should be bladed smooth so that they are gentle, rolling curves which deer net will follow very well. This makes for quicker and easier fence installation with potentially less materials used and also straighter and therefore stronger. As well as making it more deer or calf proof at ground level.

It is important to think about the lead times for the manufacture and proper treatment of timber fence posts, especially if you have a fast approaching deadline to have a field finished ready to receive your new herd of deer. Place your order as early as you can. Deer fence posts, especially strainers, and of the right dimensions, are rarely stocked in your local timber yard and most items seem to be a special order. In my experience promised lead times and delivery dates seem to slip, even from good reputable specialists.

Think long and hard about how the farm is going to be divided up with fences and races. If, like we were, you are short on time and need to simply just fence an area to make somewhere deer proof and ready to receive them, think very carefully about how this first phase of perimeter fencing will tie in with the second phase. I.e. will box strainers be in the right place to 'tee' into at a later date for internal divisions or races.

Think about access through gates, junctions and races and the largest possible vehicle that may ever need to turn through a gateway or access each paddock. It may be that in a few years a particular field gets used for growing conserved forage of some description and access will be needed by the tractor and baler as well as a bale trailer. So, think large where you can, to future proof the farm to be able to cope with all eventualities. Farm machinery, especially contractors kit, only seems to be getting bigger and bigger.

The subject of paddocks, gateways and race design is an entire book in itself and this little article is not the place to consider these in any depth. But when designing and installing the races, junctions and gates, the detail and thought really is key for both the deer and farmer.

Like the management of ditches above, think how you will manage the hedges once fences are erected. There are several schools of thought regarding hedges and deer fencing. Most fencing contractors will say that hedges and fences do not mix long term. This is mostly true and the fence is nearly always adversely affected. The ideal scenario would be to bring the fence in away from the hedge to allow a narrow strip to be maintained. Some tractor mounted hedge flails are able to reach clean over the top of deer fencing and flail the ground and hedge making management very easy. Most of us however hate giving up potential grazing ground so end up flailing existing hedges back hard, installing the new fence and slowly over time allowing the hedge to encroach on the new deer fence. Hopefully the deer will browse the hedge back and help to keep it in check.

Think about what you will do for water. You may be fortunate enough to have bought a farm with an adequate network of water troughs already. We had three troughs on the entire farm so we dug in a new 32mm MDPE system serving all the troughs in the various paddocks, standpipes in other areas and bowl drinkers in the shed.

Where will you store your conserved Winter feed? It needs to be somewhere dry and accessible throughout the Winter. If you have only seen the farm in the Summer you may not know how wet the ground sits in the winter and the best places to store anything. Equally you may not be sure which will be the driest areas to install new gates for dry access into the fields through the wet Winter months to feed. In our first winter we very quickly learnt where the wet spots were. As a result, when we came to subdivide the farm, a paddock of approximately 4 acres was created, in a way that lends itself to grazing for most of the year except in the depths of Winter when it gets too wet and is then closed till Spring.



We are nearly a year on from when the first group of Hinds arrived. It has been a very busy year, much of it spent clearing up the farm. I've put up about 7km of deer fencing, hung over 40 gates, built a handling system and outdoor yards and planted 5,000 hedgerow whips to list a few jobs. I have had a lot of fun doing it, and thoroughly enjoy working with the deer, red hinds are such great creatures.

I hope this article may be helpful to some of you and some of these little observations may provoke some further thought and consideration to the long-term design and management of your deer farm. Putting the planning and 'groundwork' in at the early stages will be worth it and pay off long term as everything will come together seamlessly and work for both you and the deer. If you get it wrong it can make a simple annual job an awkward or dangerous one and possibly a costly mistake to put right. When that strainers driven in to full depth, there's no pulling it out again.



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GLENSAUGH REVISITED

NUTRITION & GROWTH OF FARMED RED DEER IN-WINTERED ON EITHER HAYLAGE OR SILAGE

INTRODUCTION

This project arose from initial contact with the Interface Food and Drink (IFD) Initiative and its interest in increasing farmed venison production in Scotland. Following discussions with John Fletcher of BDFPA, Donald Barrie at Glensaugh and Graham Forbes of East Coast Viners Grain (ECVG), Drumlithie, Stonehaven, submitted a proposal, subsequently successful, for funding to IFD. This recognised the early developmental work on deer farming at Glensaugh and the Rowett Research Institute, Lowland Deer Research at Rosemaund, Hertfordshire and was designed to update information on nutritional science of red deer. It also aimed to compare the utilisation of grass produced on-farm and conserved either as silage or haylage, by contemporary weaned stag and hind calves in a “case study” at Glensaugh.

The project was further supported by the School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen (Hugh Galbraith) and the involvement of two students: Rosemary Hurley (MSc) and Bethany Macdonald (BSc Honours).

What follows is a brief summary of the larger report available on the BDFPA website www.bdfpa.org.uk

DESIGN OF THE STUDY:

Twenty stag and 20 hind calves were available. They were born between 15 May and 19 June 2015 at Glensaugh, and following weaning on 12 October, were each divided into two groups of 10 and winter-housed in four separate pens. They were group-fed 1kg/head daily of an ECVG beef blend concentrate supplement which provided 12.7 MJ metabolisable energy and 150g protein per kg dry matter. Typical values for composition (g/kg dry matter) for metabolisable energy and crude protein were for pit silage (12.1MJ and 116g) and haylage bales (10.1MJ and 81g). The deer were weighed fortnightly and feed intake measured monthly from 27 October 2015 to 26 April 2016. Turnout was 5 May 2016. Initial liveweights averaged 58kg for stags and 52 kg for hinds.

Selected graphs and tables of results are presented along with images showing forage conservation and a group of stags in a pen, at Glensaugh and members of the team at a project review meeting at Aberdeen University.

RESULTS

Growth: stags vs hinds: silage vs haylage.

The growth of the four groups of deer is shown in **Figure 1 and Table 1**. Average final liveweights were (kg) for stags 90.6 (silage), 88.0 (haylage); and for hinds 73.7(silage); 72.4 for (haylage)

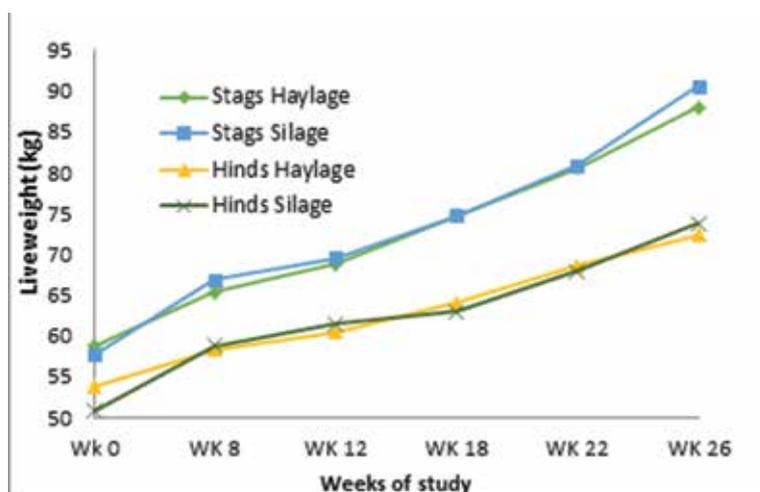


FIGURE 1. Graph showing liveweight of stag and hind red deer calves fed either grass silage or haylage from end-October 2015 to end-April 2016. (Week 8- 21 Dec: week 12- 18 Jan: Week 18- 29 Feb: Week 22- 28 Mar: Week 26 – 26 April).



Haylage bales at Glensaugh



Pit silage at Glensaugh



Example of deer in pen

LIVEWEIGHT (KG)	STAGS		HINDS	
	SILAGE	HAYLAGE	SILAGE	HAYLAGE
Mean Final	90.6	88.0	73.7	72.4
Maximum	97.8	105.7	80.77	82.5
Minimum	82.7	72.4	68.2	66.2
Mean Initial	57.8	58.8	50.8	53.0
Maximum	65.5	68.0	57.0	61.0
Minimum	52.5	52.0	42.0	46.5

TABLE 1. Average values for liveweight for stag and hind red deer calves fed silage or haylage from end-October 2015 to end-April 2016.

Gains in liveweight (kg) were 32.8 and 29.2 (stags) and 22.9 and 18.6 (hinds) for silage and haylage respectively. The stags achieved significantly greater average liveweight and gains than hinds of the order of 17kg for liveweight and 10kg for gain.

In comparing the forage diets, deer calves grew well on both diets, although the relatively poorer nutrient composition of the haylage (from chemical and digestive evaluation) and cut when grass was more mature due to adverse weather, was reflected in lesser liveweight gains for both stags and hinds. However, the relatively large variation in performance and relatively small differences in final liveweights meant that the differences were not statistically significant.

Interestingly, the heaviest stag at 106kg was fed haylage.

It is notable also that the average final liveweights of stags were of the order of 90kg and approximating to slaughter weight by turnout and for hinds in excess of the suggested 70kg required for breeding.

Results from nutrient evaluation of the feeds, and applying “scientific rationing”, can be used to plan diets to achieve production targets for venison production.

Factors such as metabolisable energy and protein requirements can be included in rationing calculations.

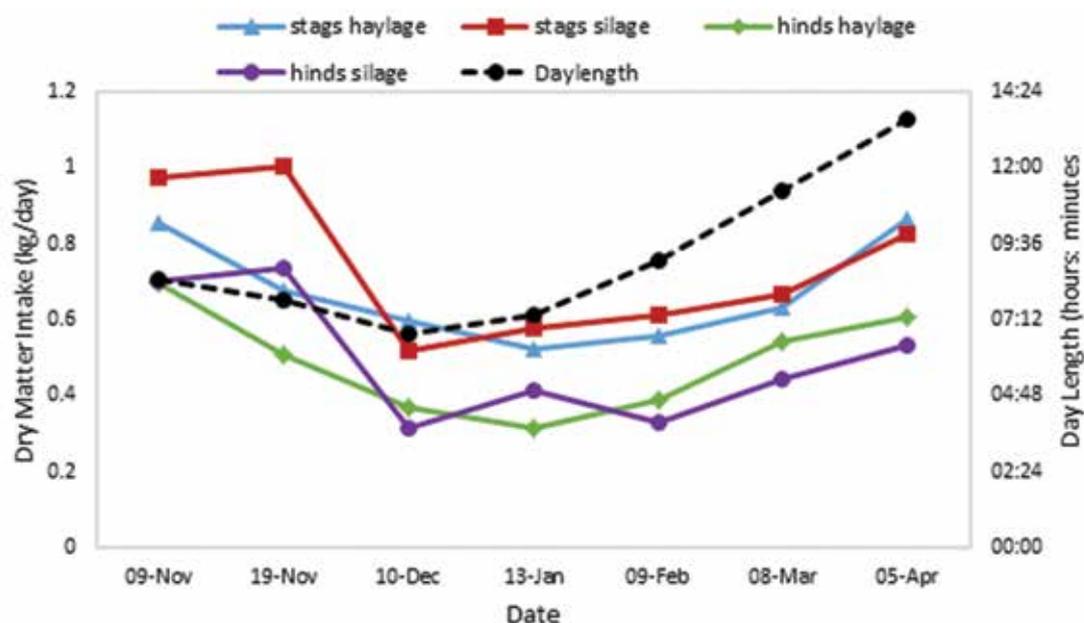


FIGURE 2. Graph showing average amounts (kg) eaten of forage dry matter by stag and hind red deer calves fed either silage or haylage and measured at different dates and showing relationship with changing daylength at Glensauagh. Note: forage is in addition to 0.85kg of concentrate dry matter fed separately

LWG KG/DAY	WEEK 0-8 27/10 - 21/12	WEEK 8-12 22/12 - 18/01	WEEK 12-18 19/01 - 29/02	WEEK 18-22 01/03 - 28/03	WEEK 22-26 29/03 - 26/04
Stags Silage	0.163	0.096	0.122	0.217	0.348
Stags Haylage	0.120	0.123	0.105	0.200	0.271
Hinds Silage	0.14	0.098	0.035	0.178	0.203
Hinds Haylage	0.080	0.078	0.083	0.165	0.133

TABLE 2. Average values for liveweight gain (LWG, kg/day) for stag and hind red deer calves fed silage or haylage from end-October 2015 to end-April 2016.

VARIATION IN PERFORMANCE:

The variation in starting and final liveweights is also shown in Table 1. Examples of differences between the heaviest and lightest stags for final liveweights were 15kg for silage and 33kg for haylage. Similarly, values for hinds were 13kg and 16kg for silage and haylage.

The question of such variation has importance in animal biology. Reasons may have a genetic basis which affects growth, ability to eat, to digest and utilise feed and to compete in a group feeding environment. Such variation suggests scope for improving performance by selection of higher merit animals in breeding programmes.

Other results, shown in the full report, established relationships which suggested that early fawning dates gave rise to the heaviest final liveweights. This suggests possible advantages in early conception in the previous Autumn and giving focus to reproduction in hinds.



*Project team at Aberdeen University, December 2016.
From left: Bethany Macdonald; John Fletcher; Donald Barrie;
Chris Stockwell (ECVG); Rosemary Hurley; Hugh Galbraith.*

EFFECTS OF DAYLENGTH:

The pattern of growth of the calves and liveweight gains, separated according to time periods throughout winter, are shown in **Table 2** and Figure 1. The relationship between seasonal changes in daylength and estimated intakes of forage dry matter consumed by the deer (in addition to the 0.85kg/day of concentrate), are shown in **Figure 2**.

Average liveweight gains tended to reduce towards the winter solstice and decreased further or were maintained until late February after which there was marked recovery in all groups. Maximum gains of 348g/day were recorded for stags on the silage diet.

These results in growth are associated with the parallel reductions in intake of both silage and haylage in December and January and into February, from the greatest intake in early November. Intakes increased markedly in March and April.

The results suggest well-recognised reductions in feed intake and growth as daylength decreases and a delay into February of intake and growth in response to increasing daylength following the winter solstice.

It is noteworthy that long night conditions in North East Scotland may be an hour longer than in the south of England.

Of course, studies with additional lighting such as to a summer pattern of 16 hours light and 8 hours dark, have been shown to reduce the impact of short days in studies both at Glensaugh and at Rosemaund. This has been reported as an effective way of increasing production efficiency and works particularly well in reaching slaughter weight indoors by April or early May.

CONCLUSIONS:

The study demonstrated the potential for growth of stag and hind red deer calves in-wintered under natural daylength conditions in North East Scotland.

Both silage and haylage as forage along with a good quality concentrate supplement supported gains in liveweight to achieve in excess of 90kg for stags and 70kg for hinds by end of April. The heaviest liveweights were associated with the earliest birth dates.

Stags ate more and grew faster than hinds.

Considerable variation was evident in growth of individual deer, suggesting scope for selection, for breeding, from the best performing animals.

Growth performance on silage tended to be better than on haylage reflecting, on analysis, superior chemical and nutritional value and giving average benefits, although statistically non-significant, of 2.5kg (stags) to 1.3 (hinds) liveweight.

All groups responded to decreasing daylength by reducing forage intake and rates of liveweight gains (although all still gained weight), but with recovery of intake and growth rates after mid- to end-February.

The question of increasing lighting to overcome short day inappetance is considered.

BDFPA Council

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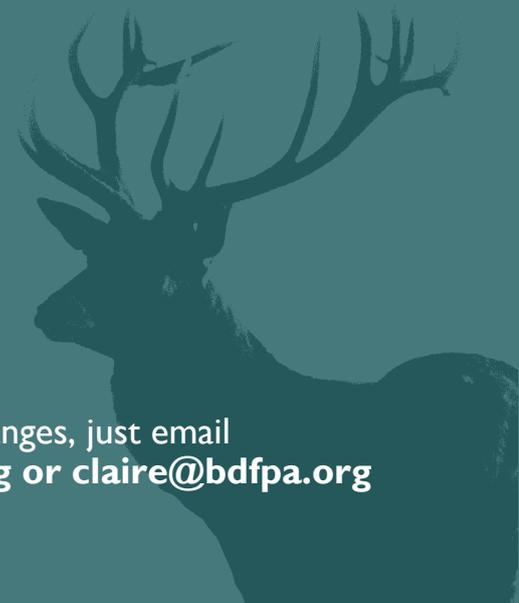
Contact the BDFPA
Tel: 08456 344758 Email: info@bdfpa.org
Web: www.bdfpa.org or www.deeruk.org

BDFPA Members

As members of the BDFPA, we now mainly communicate with you via email so your contact details are key.

Please ensure that you keep the office updated with any changes to your email address.

To make any changes, just email
info@bdfpa.org or claire@bdfpa.org



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Website: www.welshvenisoncentre.co.uk

Middlewood Farm, Bwlch, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7HQ

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



10th May 2018

Deer Open Day - Trefranck Farm, St. Clether, Launceston, Cornwall, PL15 8QN

8th June 2018

Deer Open Day - Tunnel Hill Mews, Knock Lane, Blisworth, Northamptonshire, NN7 3DA

6th to 8th July 2018

BDFPA Summer Family Conference- Maplehurst Farm, Nuthurst Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 6RB

24th August 2018

Deer Open Day - Sky Park Farm, West Harting, Hampshire GU31 5PF

27th October 2018

BDFPA 40th Anniversary Dinner - The Farmer's Club, 3 Whitehall Court, London, SW1A 2EL

Members and non-members welcome to all events. Reduced rates for members will be available. For more details and to book places go to www.bdfpa.org/events

BDFPA TRAINING COURSES

The table below outlines provisional dates for BDFPA training courses running in 2018.

MONTH	COURSE	PRACTICAL WORK	NUMBER OF DAYS
March/April	Introduction to Deer Farming	Theory based only	1 day
May	Health of Farmed Deer	Copper, worming etc	1 day
June	Introduction to Deer Farming	Theory based only	1 day
July	Health of Farmed Deer	Copper worming etc	1 day
August	De-Antlering	De-Antlering	1 day
August	Mothering Up	Calf weaning and tagging, Mothering up	2 days
September	Reproduction in Red Deer	AI/ET/Sperm collection	2 days
October	Introduction to Park Culling	Culling larder requirements etc	1 day
November	Introduction to Farmed Deer	Theory based only	2 days
December	Health of Farmed Deer	Copper, worming etc	1 day

* De-Antlering courses may happen at more than one location over a number of days depending on numbers of delegates and availability of teaching sites.

We are also hoping to add a series of fencing courses throughout the year, so please keep an eye on the website at www.bdfpa.org/training-courses

For more information on specific courses, please contact our Training Officer, Dee Dyer at training@bdfpa.org

ROTATIONAL GRAZING - NEW IDEAS



James Logan

May I first of all say how pleased, if somewhat surprised I was to be asked by Dan De Baerdemaecker to contribute this article for this years' BDFPA Handbook, as admittedly my first-hand experience of farming deer is minimal to say the least. However, having recently taken delivery of our first 111 hinds, it is growing exponentially! With this limited knowledge in mind please excuse any flaws that you find in the following and feel free to let me know if you foresee any disasters with the ideas that I plan to implement.

As a means of introduction, Pirntaton is a large upland livestock unit in the Scottish Borders, towards the top end of the beautiful Galawater valley. Lying almost due south of Edinburgh and 14 miles north of the famous "Mill Town" of Galashiels, it covers 640ha with 570ha effective, rises from 230m – 520m above sea level and is a mixture of improved and native pastures including over 100ha of heather moorland. It currently carries around 2150 breeding ewes, 115 suckler cows and since the beginning of September 2017, 111 hinds with plans to increase to around 300 in place. As well as home, our two employees and myself also manage a further 850 ewes on a neighbouring sporting estate. Invaluable back-up is also on hand from wife Jane, mother Liz and kids James and Beth.

Dan's invitation to put pen to paper was to try and explain the methods and results of a major reinvention of our farming system here that he felt may also be relevant to the deer farming sector. In 2014 after a couple of false starts we committed fully to the implementation of grass measuring, sub-division, rotational grazing and feed budgeting. In plain English we set about quantifying the amount of grass we had on the farm, dividing up our large fields into smaller more manageable paddocks, grazing these paddocks in rotation rather than set stocking the whole field for the season and carefully allocating different amounts and quality of pasture to different stock groups over the course of the year.

At the same time we were approached by QMS (Quality Meat Scotland) to host one of their regional "Grazing Groups", which was a new project aimed at promoting such practices and quantifying the benefits. The results have been staggering to say the least and I'm now the first to admit that I had previously been making a pretty moderate attempt at farming efficiently! In simple terms, over the last 4 years we have been able to increase our ewe numbers by almost 50%. Output of kgLW/ha (liveweight produced per hectare) which was one of the key benchmarks of the project) has increased by around 30%, all whilst using almost 300 tonnes less bought in feed per year or £60,000 for easy counting! The whole of the added infrastructure of new electric fences and a gravity fed water system covering 500ha has been paid for by these savings from the first year.

In 2016, as the area of sub-divided land increased further (we now graze in over 130 paddocks) and with the accompanying lift in pasture quality it became evident that we could carry yet more stock. With all the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, support payments and most importantly, the future of the lamb/mutton market that we are so heavily exposed to, the exciting decision was taken to diversify into the production of venison to exploit this new found surplus of quality pasture. Such is the "biological fit" of Red Deer and our pasture growth curve that we envisage having the feed resource on farm to add a herd of 250-300 hinds. The added driver of maximising the output of kgLW/ha from the limited area within the deer fence is one I'm sure you will all sympathise with and



the main reason why I have set up our deer paddocks with sub-division in mind from the offset. Paddocks average around 3ha with water troughs situated to allow halving them with electric fences as required. The ideal is to have paddocks grazed for no longer than 3 days.

With ewe numbers up again this year as well as the inclusion of the deer we look forward to overall output and profit continuing to rise if we remain committed to keeping costs down.

So where do you start? Pasture management is obviously a huge topic and impossible to cover fully in a short article such as this, however, I suggest that there are a few main principles that must be grasped. Please remember that I make assumptions about the grazing management of deer from my experience with sheep and beef cattle but I can't see that the principles should be vastly different and that the simple general rule, that the most profitable beef/sheep farmers are those who utilise pasture best and keep cost of production low should equally apply in the deer sector.

Firstly, note that properly grazed, rotational pasture will easily grow 30% more over a 12 month period than traditionally set-stocked pasture. As mentioned previously the pasture quality will also be much improved. Productive pasture species thrive on a short, sharp, heavy grazing followed by a period of rest. This allows quick regrowth without energy reserves in the plant roots being depleted. The continual depletion of these energy reserves and letting the productive grasses go to head in a set-stocking situation allows less productive weed grasses to overpower the sown species and necessitate regular reseeding. Our reseeding policy of permanent pastures has almost ceased completely since the introduction of rotational

grazing. In fact we have seen a massive reversal in pasture species make up in tired old swards with no more input than a few fences and attention to P, K and pH levels.

Secondly, utilisation of that precious feed resource within the deer fence could be increased from around 50% in a set-stocking situation to around 85% in a well-managed rotational system, the equivalent of having an extra 70% of farmed area with a much reduced investment. The combined effects of these first two points is mind blowing and was very clearly spelled out to me at the start of our development programme by Kiwi consultant Murray Rohloff as, "the cheapest way to buy the equivalent of your neighbours farm".

Thirdly, I suggest that time is taken to fully understand the nutritional "timeline" for the production cycle of whatever species or stock class you are grazing. Each annual cycle is made up of critical periods when un-limited, high quality feed must be made available. Good cases in point here are that we are consistently getting finishing cattle to perform as well on grass only during the summer as we have ever been able to when housed on a finishing ration and that we have completely replaced bought in concentrate for ewes in the period around lambing time by rotationally grazing and carefully allocating our precious spring grass. At other times of year savings can be made and grazing restricted to maintenance levels. We have grazed up to 1100 ewes in a mob utilising only 0.85ha/day during mid pregnancy. Required dry matter and energy (ME) intakes must be known and met at each stage to ensure optimal physical and financial performance.

The fourth point is that managing a rotational grazing system isn't easy and requires constant monitoring, but the rewards can be huge. This doesn't however



mean that an elaborate paddock system is needed from the off. As mentioned earlier, simply placing water troughs at a point where an existing paddock can be halved with an electric fence will give immediate results. Stags in hard antler will obviously limit the period when this system can be used safely. Livestock performance is driven by pasture quality and availability. Entry covers and residuals (heights of grass at beginning and end of a grazing period) are crucial to ensure that the aims of animal performance, maintaining pasture quality and utilisation are met. There is a fine balance, with a compromise often having to be made. Often, what is best for maintaining pasture quality is detrimental to high stock performance. This point seems very much the case for deer, where research has shown that grazing down to a height of 4- 5cm (which would help ensure subsequent quality) will penalise deer growth rates. In this instance management practices such as post grazing mowing or using a “slave mob” of another, lower priority stock class or species to graze down to desired residual could be a huge help.

Likewise, grazing entry level is crucial to ensure that grass quality is such that the growth potential of the animal can be exhibited. As soon as grass starts to pass the vegetative state into the reproductive state (starts to head) then the ME levels of the animals diet will plummet. The double whammy here is that low ME grass as well as being less palatable is also much less digestible, so passage through the gut is slowed, reducing overall intake even further. This can make a huge difference to the amount of energy available over and above maintenance for growth in a young/finishing animal or milk production in a lactating female. The key here is to drop paddocks that have reached this stage out of the rotation and conserve as silage. This is where measuring and monitoring grass growth becomes invaluable as a feed budget can then be pulled together which will show up any excess or shortfall before it actually happens and early, informed decisions made rather than knee jerk reactionary ones.

As far as equipment is concerned there are a few basics required. We are obviously spoiled in the sheep and beef sectors as far as temporary electric fences go with a wide choice of both reels and semi-permanent systems available. However I am reliably informed that deer paddocks can also be successfully sub-divided using horse type electric fencing and that, hard antlers aside they can be used safely and effectively. Even the expense of dividing existing paddocks with permanent fences could be justified when considering the improvement in animal performance and pasture utilisation. Lea Leachman (of US cattle fame) preaches that “our land is our greatest and most expensive resource, so make the best use of it”.

Water in these new paddocks is the other obvious necessity but a header tank towards the top of the farm and a network of pipe, which can be laid on the surface to further flexibility, needn't cost a fortune. Permanent water troughs take the hassle out of stock shifts but good quick coupling fittings are also available to enable moving a trough with the stock or a bowser could also be used. Placing troughs at the mid-point of fence lines immediately helps with future sub-division and cuts costs.



To get the best out of your new paddock system it's great to know how grass is growing and what feed resource you have in front of you. The two main methods of measuring grass are by using a Rising Plate Meter or the simple Sward Stick, which is basically a ruler calibrated for the different seasons to tell you how much feed there is. The results can be entered into a simple spread sheet or uploaded into one of the many Pasture and Feed budgeting software packages that are readily available. This will be invaluable in helping make those decisions about when to drop paddocks for silage, apply fertiliser to ensure enough feed going forward and even when to start supplementary feeding to spin out pasture until a certain date.

To take it to the next level this info can be put into complex Feed and Financial budgeting software like Farmax which can let you play around with different scenarios of the whole farm system and see its financial effect at the end of the year, but we won't go there today.

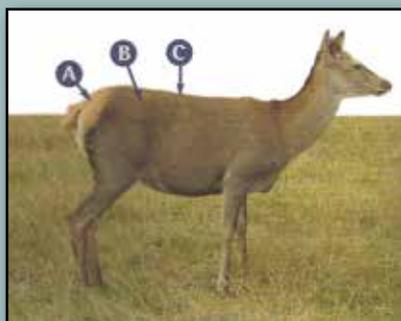
Of course no system is perfect and the process here hasn't been without mistakes. It's been a steep learning curve regarding rotation lengths, getting entry levels and residuals right, especially for ewes and lambs. Personally I think that the longish period of set-stocking around calving time will actually help in a deer farming situation, by not making hinds work too hard during that critical period of early lactation where calf growth rate could so easily be compromised in pursuit of grass quality. Parasite challenge will have to be monitored carefully with much higher stocking rates although I'd say that we don't drench any more than before, but would definitely be targeting treatments much more. Deer obviously might not suit quite such high stocking rates as sheep or cattle because of the social issues that can be experienced but there is bound to be a happy medium.

In summary the whole subject can seem a bit daunting to start with but the first steps can be very straightforward as any division is better than no division. The basic principles are simple i.e keeping the right amount of high quality feed in front of as many animals on each hectare of your farm as possible can give you the highest animal performance at the lowest cost of production and the highest profitability. I for one, am very excited at the prospect of producing such a high quality and in demand product as venison from such a system.

After you've built the new system you just need to get used to the curious stares from friends and neighbours, but as deer farmers you're probably already used to that!

Look forward to meeting you all.

PREDICTING THE Live Body Cond



BENEFITS OF LIVE BODY CONDITION SCORING INCLUDE:-

- Maximise financial returns from processed animals
- Ensure processors meet their market specifications
- Potential to save on feeding costs
- Complements the BDFPA Quality Assurance Schemes
- Prevents welfare problems
- Reduces susceptibility to diseases
- Improves hind conception rates

LIVE BODY CONDITION SCORING

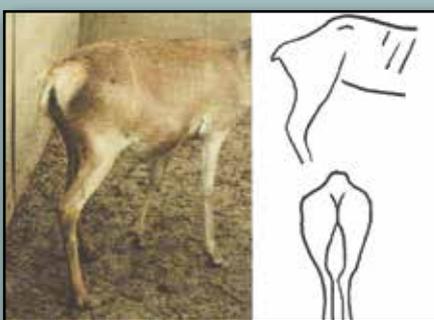
Condition scoring is a subjective handling technique to assess how much muscle and fat an animal is carrying and is also indicative of body reserves. Ideally, condition scoring should be undertaken in the race prior to weighing, this will allow any changes in body condition score or live weight to be reconciled.

Condition scoring should be undertaken where possible by the same person. This will ensure consistent results, enabling a comparison between individuals in one group and the monitoring of any changes over a period of time.

DETAILS OF LIVE CONDITION SCORES (1-5)

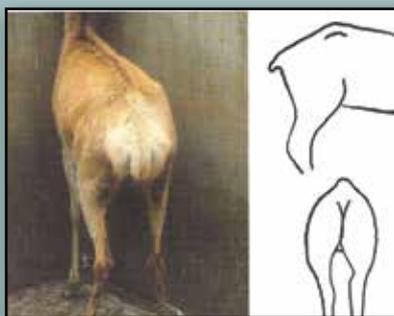
The amount of fat and muscle cover is given on a scale of one to five, with one being 'very lean' and five being 'excessively fat':

- (A) Rump region between the wings of pelvis and tail head
- (B) Transverse processes over the lumbar vertebrae
- (C) Spinous processes



CONDITION SCORE: 1 (VERY LEAN)

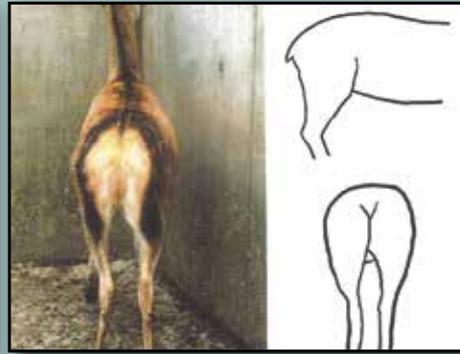
Score 1: The spinous and transverse processes are prominent and sharp. The fingers can be pushed easily under the transverse processes and each process can be felt. The loin and rump muscles are thin and have no fat cover.



CONDITION SCORE: 2 (LEAN)

Score 2: The spinous processes are prominent but smooth, individual processes being felt only as corrugations. The transverse processes are smooth and rounded but it is still possible to press the fingers underneath. The loin and rump muscles are of moderate depth but with little fat cover.

Condition OF FARMED RED DEER



CONDITION SCORE: 3 (PRIME)

Score 3: The spinous processes are smooth and rounded; bone is felt only with pressure. The transverse processes are also smooth and well covered; hard pressure with the fingers is needed to find the ends. The loin and rump muscles are full, with a moderate fat cover.



CONDITION SCORE: 4 (FAT)

Score 4: The spinous processes are detectable only as a line; the ends of the transverse processes cannot be felt. The loin and rump muscles are full and have a thick covering of fat.

CONDITION SCORE: 5 (OVER FAT)

Score 5: The spinous processes cannot be detected even with pressure. There is a dimple in the fat layers where the processes are positioned. The transverse processes cannot be detected. The loin and rump muscles are very full, rounded and covered with very thick fat.



Guidelines for undertaking live condition scoring:-

- Deer need to be standing naturally but with restricted movement.
- Condition scoring should be undertaken where possible by the same person.
- The assessor should use the tips of fingers and thumb.
- Always condition score with the same hand from the same side.
- Minimise the time between selection and slaughter, ideally three days should be the maximum.
- If a deer becomes agitated and uncooperative, then it should be released immediately.
- Ensure the working environment is safe for both deer and assessor.
- To obtain consistent and reliable results assessors should reconcile live condition scores with carcass classification scores.
- Occasional visits by assessors to an abattoir to inspect deer carcasses, is a valuable exercise.

CARCASE CLASSIFICATION GUIDE

EXTERNAL FAT SCALE



1

No trace of fat, muscles dark.
Dry look to surface.



2

No evidence of fat on rump or
flanks. Slight fat lining to body cavity
behind kidneys.



3

Slight "whitewash" appearance
to rump. Kidneys half-enclosed
by fat.



4

Definite covering of fat over rump and
flank. Kidneys enclosed
by fat.



5

Heavy covering of fat over rump
and flank. Kidneys hardly visible
and heavy fat deposits in the
body cavity.

CONFORMATION



E

A "U" enhanced in all directions. Expected Smithfield winner.



U

Well filled saddle, no projections of spine. Haunches well muscled and rounded. Animal wedge shaped thickening towards the rear.



R

Slight projection of spine can be felt along back. Haunches flat not rounded. Neck and shoulders as heavy as rear end.



O

Definite ridge can be felt along back. Haunches hollow. Front tends to look heavier and thicker than the rear end.



P

Altogether skiny and underfinished with ribs and pin bones protruding.

EXPANDING YOUR HORIZONS

Our son recently spent a year in New Zealand and since he has returned home we have greatly expanded our deer farm. We have recently bought 20 acres from a neighbour which came onto the market. It is a good time to buy land in our area and it has dropped in price due to worries around Brexit. We obtained lending at 3.17% which is at its lowest level historically.

Our first project which started in January 2017 was to fence off our former arable section of 35 acres. It is well draining land facing south and fairly level which is rare in our area. The block is also reasonably square which makes it more economic to fence. The first job was to clear all of the old electric fencing. We kept the posts, insulators and wire as this enabled us to include an electric wire on top of the deer netting. Once this was done the hedge trimmer tidied up all the hedges.

Fencing started in mid February and we hired a post rammer for two months. In that period we banged in all of the posts for the boundary and the internal posts splitting the block into four paddocks. For the boundary fence, strainers from 7" to 8" and 5" to 6" where required. The intermediate posts were 3" to 4" by 9 feet and we used sheep netting and electric tape. We find our deer are well trained to electric and conventional intermediate fencing is adequate and greatly reduced the cost. The main fencing timber was all Russian Redwood and most of the intermediate was Sweet Chestnut.

Once all of the posts were in place we put up box section strainers which gives good strength. Then the netting was erected using Tornado 6 inch box section which, in our opinion, is the best you can buy. It is extremely strong and cuts down on the amount of timber required. Posts were put in every 8 metres. To strain the netting we used metal clamps pulled with the tractor to give a good even tension. All of the fencing was completed in one month and amounted to 1850 metres of deer fencing and 600 metres of conventional fencing.

TABLE 1: BOUNDARY FENCE
(35 acres, 4 paddocks including two yards) 1750m

	AMOUNT	COST	TOTAL COST
Netting (Tornado T13/190/15)	17.5 rolls	£170 per roll	£2975.00
Strainers	15 (6" to 7")	£16.75 per strainer	£251.25
	15 (5" to 6")	£10.50 per strainer	£157.50
Staples	2 buckets	£34.00 per bucket	68.00
Nails			£20.00
Posts	280 (9'x3"x4")	£3.50	£980.00
Post Rammer Hire			£200.00
Gates	4	£80.00 per gate	£320.00
	Total: 1750m		£4971.75

Price per metre = £2.84 pm before labour costs

NB: Electric top wire from Gallagher Fencing

NB: Materials from previous fence saving approx. £600.00



TABLE 2: SUB DIVISION OF 4 PADDOCKS

(includes enclosure for big bale silage, sheep netting and electric wire)

	AMOUNT	COST	TOTAL COST
Netting	600m	£50 per roll	£300.00
Stakes	105 (5'6"x3£x4")	£2.40 per stake	£252.00
Gates	6	£50 per gate	£300.00
Strainers	14 (7'x5" to 6")	£8.25 per strainer	£115.50
Excavations		£200	£200.00
	Total 625m		£1167.00

Price per metre = £1.86 per metre before labour costs

TABLE 3: YARDS WITH 4 PENS

(Yards constructed inside concrete based shed on 3 sides - 45' x 30' figures include timber for outside yard)

	AMOUNT	COST	TOTAL COST
Timber	20 lengths (3.6m x 4"x2")	£1.25 per metre	£90.00
	30 lengths (4.8m x 6"x1")	£1.00 per metre	£144.00
	20 lengths (4.8m x 6"x1")	£1.25 per metre	£90.00
Board	26 sheets (8'x4')	£12.50 per sheet	£325.00
Gates (with board bolted on to create solid gate)	3 Gates x 12' 1 Gate x 8'	£54.00 per gate £52.00 per gate	£162.00 £52.00
Concrete			£200.00
Bolts/Locks/Screws			£100.00
Strainer Posts	2 Posts (10'x6"x7")	£16.75 per post	£33.50
	6 posts (10'x5"x6")	£10.50 per post	£63.00
	10 posts (9'x3"x4")	£3.50 per post	£35.00
Extras			£200.00
	Total Cost for Yards		£1494.50

In April, 70 deer were moved to the new ground from the main farm. They were nearly all yearling stags including 20 stags purchased. We also had to reseed 15 acres with red clover rye grass leys but there was ample grass on the remaining 20 acres. Our aim is to fatten at least 120 deer which we have bred on the main farm and produce most of our silage. This year we have averaged 66.3kg carcass weight at 15-16 months of age with no concentrate. Top quality red clover and Rye grass leys give tremendous growth rates and it is easily possible to produce over £1000 of venison per acre.

We have also purchased a further 20 acres from our neighbour at the main deer farm and which we will be fencing soon. This puts us to a maximum of 150 hinds which amounts to 1.5 hinds per acre. I prefer to do the deer really well with lower inputs, with sensible stocking densities.

On our fattening unit, we have also built a new handling system in the cattle shed. It always amazes me the

amount of money spent on yards! We have built a solid system which works well for under £1500. We have a mobile crush which can be moved between the two units.

I have always had great faith in deer farming. We have farmed up to 300 acres with conventional enterprises but our tenancies expired so we can now only farm the land we own, which will be solely deer. It is giving us a solid income and because there are periods when labour uses are very low, it means that our son can do contract work, milking and machinery, when we are not busy.

The future for venison is fantastic and Waitrose have just put in a new deer line, needing many thousands of deer. We are now organic and the main supplier for Riverford. We are paid a good premium, but it does mean culling on the farm where one has to be well organised and to be able to do large batches at a time.

If anyone wants more information or to visit us, please contact me, Tony Bennett on 01884 855519. I have been farming deer for 35 years, including experience in New Zealand.

RECIPE...

SPRING INSPIRED ASIAN LETTUCE VENISON WRAPS

Spring Fever...we all feel it! Warmer weather, more daylight, birds are singing. This warmer weather brings on cravings for fresh foods, but we can't forget the venison stock piled in the freezer. It's time for a spring venison recipe!

1 LB. VENISON LOIN, CUBED SMALL
1 HEAD ROMAINE LETTUCE, OR LETTUCE OF CHOICE
½ PACKET OF RICE NOODLES (OPTIONAL, USED FOR ADDED CRUNCH/ GARNISH)
1/2 CUP. OLIVE OIL OR VEGETABLE OIL
1 CUP RED ONION, DICED
2 CLOVES GARLIC, CRUSHED
1 TBSP. GINGER, GRATED
¼ CUP WATER CHESTNUTS, DICED
¼ CUP SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS, DICED
2 ONIONS, THINLY SLICED
5 TBSP. HOISIN SAUCE
2 TBSP. SOY SAUCE
1 TBSP. RICE VINEGAR
1 TBSP. CHILLI SAUCE, ADD MORE OR LESS ACCORDING TO DESIRED TASTE
1 PINCH SALT & PEPPER

METHOD

Prepare the noodles. Take amount suggested out of package and add to bowl of hot water until soft, approximately 10 minutes. After soaked, let noodles drain and place on plate with paper towels to absorb remaining moisture. This is important for when you fry the noodles.

While allowing noodles to dry, wash lettuce and place off to side to dry. Now is the time to dice, and slice remaining ingredients and set those off to the side when finished.

Return to the now dried noodles. Add the majority of oil to a large hot pan (save approx. a tbsp. for later in the recipe). Sprinkle cut up noodles in oil for approximately 1 minute. Noodles will sink to the bottom, once they float to the top of the oil, remove and place onto paper towels to cool.

Heat remaining oil in large pan over a medium high heat and add in the cubed venison loin. Season with the salt and pepper and cook until browned or to your taste.

Stir in the remaining ingredients, and cook until onions are tender approximately 3- 5 minutes.

To serve, spoon several tablespoons of venison mixture onto the middle of a lettuce leaf, add noodles to top for added crunch, then wrap to enjoy the freshness!

Optional toppings: Shredded carrots, pine nuts, and radish will add flavour and colour to this dish.



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"It is rare to have a particular speciality in deer and managing the ground to maximise the potential, where a generic agronomist would not have been so beneficial."

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Martin Harwood - Deer Manager
Telephone: **07734977088**
Email: **Martin.Harwood@woburn.co.uk**

Please note that numbers are limited.

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- Sires up to 57 points.
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- Further exciting data pending.

WE OFFER AN ANNUAL CROP FROM FARM AND PARK OF:

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ENQUIRIES AND INSPECTION ALWAYS WELCOME.
Please contact anytime.

Jonathan Lucas 0044 0 1403 265 024

Mark Jennings (Herd manager) 0044 0 7866 167 994

Email office@warnhampark.com

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