

# DEER INDUSTRY NEWS

Issue 37 • August 2009 • Official magazine of Deer Industry New Zealand and the NZDFA

## Are we there yet?

New velvet marketing structure announced:  
p12

### Also in this issue:

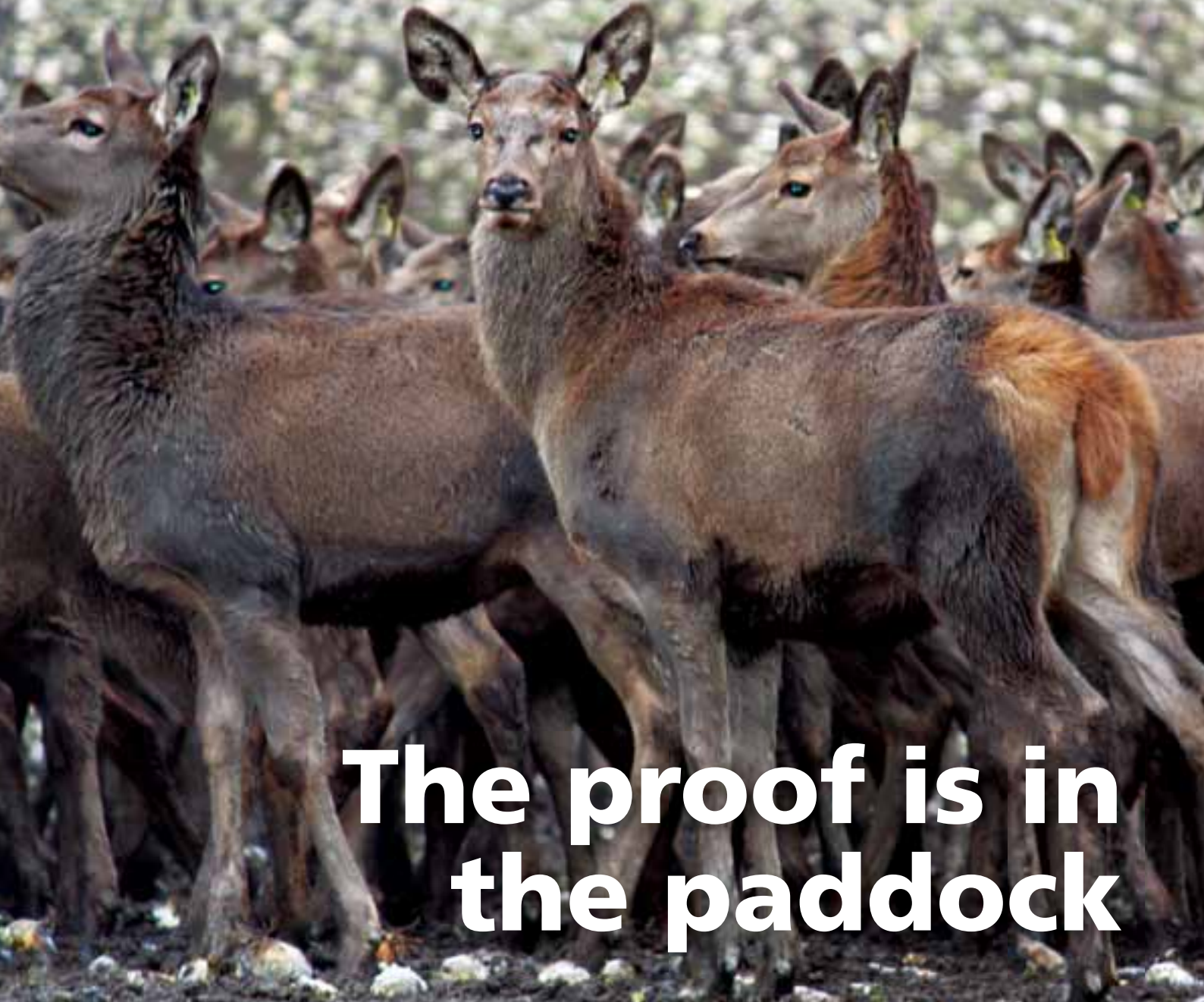
- Velveting: a reminder of our responsibilities
- Deer Industry Technical Conference
- Reducing runoff
- Vaccination of deer
- Chemistry 101 and fertiliser use
- Market focus: Germany
- Maintaining food service promotion



**DEER INDUSTRY  
NEW ZEALAND**

NZDFA  
New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association





# The proof is in the paddock

**Hard evidence is emerging on farms all over New Zealand that high Breeding Value red deer genetics are dramatically improving venison production systems.**

The latest crop of stag fawns from the nucleus herd at Balfour averaged 100.8 kg by the end of May. What has also impressed visitors to the farm is the conformation. As is obvious in the photograph, these are high yielding animals. CT scanning confirms not only that our red deer are higher yielding than wap terminals, they can be further improved with more selection.

In the North Island, at The Steyning, owned by Tim Aitken and Lucy Robertshawe, the Focus Farm trial results are similarly impressive. The Deer Improvement AI-bred progeny not only matched the hybrid wapiti at weaning, they have gone on to leave them behind by winter.

Stag fawn weights at The Steyning, 2009		
	Hybrid	Deer Improvement Reds
Weaning weights	54.3 kg	54.6 kg
Winter weights	73.5 kg	78.0 kg

These results were achieved from matings carried out in 2008, only four years after Deer Improvement began to apply scientific rigour to improving genetics for venison production. Next season is 2010. You can be sure we've not been standing still.

**Why not see for yourself what high BV reds can do in your situation?**

**Bruce McGregor** 027 233 2063  
General Manager

**Hayden Hughes** 027 233 2064  
Otago, Southland, Te Anau

**Geoff Warren** 027 231 4094  
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[www.deerimprovement.co.nz](http://www.deerimprovement.co.nz)

BETTLEBRO

# Smart, science-based decisions will help move us forward



*Over the last 12 months, DINZ, NZDFA and the New Zealand Veterinary Association's Deer Branch have been planning a joint technical conference, and the inaugural Deer Industry Technical Conference was duly held last month in Christchurch.*

Attendance was from across the deer industry with an excellent cross section of scientists, veterinarians, industry representatives and farmers.

Those who have attended past Deer Branch conferences will remember that they provide an excellent update and review of all science relating to practical hands-on deer farming.

A common misconception is that presentations in technical conferences will go over the heads of everyone but a few. This could not be further from the truth. These conferences are packed with productivity recommendations, industry updates and international farming perspectives and create the ideal forum to mix and learn from like-minded and dedicated deer enthusiasts.

The joint organisers of this conference urge more deer farmers, especially, to consider attending this significant information transfer event in following years, and additional effort will be made next year to promote this conference and attract more attendees.

While the total number of registrations of 83 was pleasing, the organisers look forward to attracting a much greater number of deer farmers next year.

## The deer industry productivity strategy

The New Zealand deer industry has usefully developed a productivity strategy, as a means of focusing on the simple but essential concepts required to make our industry a high achiever again.

It is regrettable that promising research can sit undeveloped. While paid for by industry and showing exciting potential, some research results nevertheless go unheeded.

Our industry is guilty of this too. One such example is the doctorate work of a clever Massey PhD holder, Lauren Audije. Some 15 years ago, Lauren provided some of the most compelling solutions and sobering statistics for the New Zealand deer industry.

And nearly 10 years ago, the South Canterbury Deer Farmers Association provided the industry with the Deer Master project, again showing promising results.


Now we have the deer industry productivity strategy.

It is exciting for our industry that there are deer farmers out there who are proving it's possible to be high achievers in terms of genuine productivity measures.

The take home message is this: just because there is a favourable venison schedule, let us not rest on our laurels. Let's see if we can all achieve the gold standard.

As deer farming professionals running multi-million dollar operations, surround yourselves with smart people and intelligent discussion to help you make informed decisions.

To paraphrase AgResearch Chief Scientist, Steve Goldson, from the 2009 Deer Industry Technical Conference, when you are operating in an increasingly complex farming environment, don't make decisions in ignorance based on intuition – make informed decisions based on fact.

The management of Johne's Disease is just one example of good science-based decision making, and it is only one of many examples in deer farming where smart, informed advisers can help add real value. 

■ **Adrian Campbell, veterinarian and President of the Deer Branch, New Zealand Veterinary Association**

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# Velvetting: don't underestimate our welfare responsibilities

**Most deer farmers in New Zealand who have deer that require velvetting are either active members of the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB) de velvetting programme or employ a veterinarian to remove the velvet for them.**

There are a small number of deer farmers who choose not to follow either course, and therefore pose significant risks to the deer industry because of animal welfare concerns and also from potential market access positions.

Last season (2008/2009) a surveillance programme was conducted at deer slaughter plants throughout New Zealand, identifying consignments of deer that had been velvetted. Names of suppliers were checked off against the NVSB database and those whose names were not listed as active velvetters were passed on by New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Enforcement Directorate (MAF ED)

MAF ED personnel contacted each farmer to ascertain how the velvet was removed and by whom. As a result of the surveillance programme, 67 farmers have been interviewed and advised of their responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

The removal of velvet from any deer, no matter whether it's a spiker (first year) or an adult stag, is regarded as a controlled surgical procedure under the Animal Welfare Act. This means that it can only be performed by a veterinarian, a supervised veterinarian undergraduate, an approved owner or an approved employee in accordance with the NVSB programme. Anyone falling outside these criteria who removes velvet or velvet spikes is deemed to be velvetting illegally. Any prosecution for illegally carrying out a controlled surgical procedure carries a criminal offence under the Animal Welfare Act. There is also provision for a fine not exceeding \$25,000 and/or a jail sentence of not more than six months.

The surveillance programme will continue during this coming season and MAF ED will be active in following up any person found to be operating illegally.

Velvet removal is a particularly contentious issue. For example, velvetting is banned by law in the United Kingdom on welfare grounds. Maintaining animal welfare standards therefore has direct economic benefits through enabling continued market access to countries that challenge this practice.

Practices that may once have been deemed acceptable are also being continually reassessed and modified according to new knowledge and changing attitudes. In addition, it is important to maintain a credible system to control the use of animal remedies in food-producing animals (like venison, velvet is classed as a food product) and failure to do so could result in the closing of access to markets through use of non-tariff trade barriers.

Issues associated with traditional sheep and cattle farming (such as humane slaughter, tail docking, castration, and so on) also affect the deer industry. However, a number of factors unique to deer farming have caused heightened attention and welfare concern. The public have a strong empathy with deer. This results from their extensive

characterisation in children's stories and their nobility status on hunting estates. In addition, deer are still viewed as wild animals by many people, with a range of behavioural features (e.g., agile, aggressive) not well suited to the close handling required in farming.

Velvet removal exposes stags to a range of potentially stressful practices, including mustering, yarding, drafting, restraint and removal of sensitive antler tissue.

It is important, then, that velvetters adhere to the industry-agreed withholding times for use of velvetting drugs and velvet removal before slaughter (seven days), and to transport requirements as described in the DeerQA Transport Programme and in the AWAC Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Animals Transported within New Zealand (1994).

Ultimately, maintaining and improving standards of welfare benefits not only the animals but also farmers and exporters, through enhancing productivity and improving international market access.

## Process for joining the NVSB

It's a very simple process.

The applicant can choose to be certificated for any or all of the following methods for removing or preventing velvet growth:

- chemical restraint (with local analgesia)
- local anaesthetic (with physical restraint)
- NaturO™ ring procedures for spikers (including the cable tie method).

## Certification of the new velvetter using drugs

To register as a velvetter, the applicant needs to sign a supervisory contract with a supervising veterinarian and pay the initial joining fee to the NVSB. To complete certification, there is a three-stage evaluation process:

**Stage one:** multiple choice theory test.

**Stage two:** visit conducted by the supervising veterinarian, covering facilities, a practical assessment and oral questions.

**Stage three:** assessment visit conducted by an independent supervising veterinarian, including assessment of facilities, practical assessment and oral questions.

## Certification of the new velvetter using NaturO™ Rings

To register as a velvetter, the applicant needs to sign a supervisory contract with a supervising veterinarian and pay

# Deer welfare cases expected to fall

Progress with database development and enforcement is reducing the numbers of animal welfare cases being reported by New Zealand Food Safety Authority Verification Agency (NZFSA VA) veterinarians, Les Gainsford of the NZFSA VA told the Deer Industry Technical Conference held in Christchurch last month. The conference was hosted by the Deer Branch of the New Zealand Veterinary Association.

However, he said a significant number of deer farmers were still not complying with the Animal Welfare Act 1999 or the NVSB programme regarding velvet removal.

the initial joining fee to the NVSB. To complete certification, there are two types of evaluation to pass:

**Stage one:** multiple choice theory test. (Completed test is returned to NVSB for marking.)

**Stage two:** visit conducted by the supervising veterinarian, covering facilities, a practical assessment and oral questions.

Those registering for NaturO™ rings only are required to have a supervisory visit from their own veterinarian. In subsequent seasons, the supervisory visit can take the form of a verbal consultation either on the farm, in the vet clinic or can be a visit to the property at the discretion of the supervising veterinarian. The NVSB must be notified of either the visit or consultation by the supervising veterinarian.

The fee for joining the NVSB in the first year is \$225. Following this, the annual fee is \$101.25. Fees cover the cost of auditing, the NVSB manual and other operating costs.

## Audits of the NVSB programme

In order to maintain national and international credibility and to assess programme compliance, 10 percent of velvetters are audited annually. This audit does not replace a supervisory or assessing veterinarian visit.

All velvetters are eligible for audit, no matter what technique they are registered for. The audit covers all of the methods for velvet removal or growth prevention used by the velvetter.

The audit is always conducted by an independent auditor approved by the NVSB and includes facilities, practical assessment and oral questions. The NVSB selects velvetters for audit and the auditor arranges the audit. The auditor is required to see the reconciled velvet record book and the velvetting drugs on hand, which must be made available on demand.

The NVSB and supervising veterinarian will be notified of the outcome of the audit by the auditor, including any corrective actions to be taken by the velvetter and supervisory veterinarian.

Deer Industry New Zealand and the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association urge all farmers who have stags and spikers that require velvetting to either join the NVSB programme or contract a veterinarian to remove the velvet. The risks involved now for individuals being caught out velvetting illegally are huge, as are the animal welfare implications for the industry.

“Many of these farmers are possibly velvetting their own and/or other stags but are not registered with the NVSB scheme. A significant number of farms haven't been recorded on the NVSB database and are therefore not in the NVSB programme.”

The number of antler-related welfare cases was expected to peak this season, he said, owing to the increased awareness and intervention of VA veterinarians.

“The number of recorded cases of non-compliance with velvet removal (and with transport QA standards) is expected to reduce significantly with increased numbers of velvetters coming into the NVSB programme. As a result, the proportion of deer welfare cases is likely to diminish significantly.”

He said that more than half of the 492 animal welfare cases reported in 2005–07 involved long or damaged velvet antler. This number had decreased in recent seasons partly because it had been over-reported in the past: “Often long antler had been recorded as an animal welfare issue, even when no damage had actually occurred.”

Veterinarians at slaughter premises had a statutory role to monitor compliance with the Animal Welfare Act and codes of welfare, and to educate and promote awareness among farmers, truckers, buyers, processors and practice veterinarians. They were also required to grade individual cases on a severity scale of 1 (worst) to 3, and refer grade 1 and some grade 2 cases to MAF Enforcement Directorate.

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# Reducing runoff needn't cost the earth

**Take a few simple and inexpensive steps to mitigate runoff and the sediment, nutrient and faecal contamination of waterways, and you will do your farm and the environment a big favour, according to Invermay soil scientist, Richard McDowell. He told the Deer Industry Technical Conference that relocating wallows could make a huge difference in reducing phosphorus, sediment and faecal microbe losses.**

“The top three sources of waterway contamination are wallows, wintering blocks and the effects of fence-line pacing. Mitigation should look at runoff from wallows, placing wintering blocks in the right place so that runoff won't reach a stream and preventing fence-line pacing. If your soils have too much nutrient, then soil nutrient budgeting helps to prevent the loss of this costly asset.”

Richard referred to soil erosion (silting-up streams), faecal bacteria (preventing water use for recreation and drinking) and eutrophication (algal growth from nitrogen and phosphorus enrichment) as the “axis of evil” in terms of environmental contamination. “Thirty years of catchment studies have shown deer can be the worst of all stock for sedimentation when wallowing, or if fence-line pacing is severe. Deer can also cause high P and N loss, though this effect is variable and not as severe as with dairying.”

He said that deer were “natural water diviners” that establish wallowing sites in either marshy ground at the head of small or temporary watercourses on the farm or adjacent to larger streams.

“The effects of this disturbance combined with excretion make for some very high nutrient and *E. coli* (an indicator of faecal contamination) concentrations in the wallow. During and after rain this is rapidly washed into streams and rivers. However, the good news is that with a little care and effort, deer wallows can be relocated to produce less runoff, and the old wallows fenced off and replanted.

“Since the deer are liable to just create a new wallow nearby, you then need to encourage them to use a spot where connection to flowing water is less likely.

“The trick is to relocate the wallows in natural depressions



**Two years before (top) and three years after fencing off a wallow.**



*A natural depression is a good place to establish a new wallow.*

or dips in the ground that don't readily overflow into watercourses after rain.

“Once you find the right spot, you might give nature a bit of a helping hand by starting a new wallow with a digger. Then, once you fence off the old one, soon the deer will make the adjustment. This confines the nutrients and prevents runoff from the wallows reaching a stream – the farther away the better. Meanwhile, you plant the old wallow to restabilise the ground and contaminant runoff rapidly dwindles.


“After we experimentally fenced off, replanted and monitored a wallow at Invermay in 2004, P levels fell dramatically by

80–95 percent – good enough in some cases to even meet regional council guidelines.”

Richard said another big issue was the effect of trampling and compaction on the porosity of soil around fence-lines, feeding pads and on wintering blocks. “Often this can cause five times the rate of sediment and phosphorus runoff experienced elsewhere in the paddocks. Strategies like adequate feed and shelter belts may help in decreasing stress, especially during calving.”

Winter pasture production is minimal, so there is little uptake of nutrients at this time. Tests showed deer paddocks could lose as much sediment and phosphorus in runoff as paddocks holding dairy cattle. Hence, placing a wintering block such that runoff cannot reach a waterway was critical to maintaining good water quality, he said. He also advocated

using Overseer™ to fix soil nutrient balances and to see how a deer farm is performing with regard to nutrient losses.

However, it was important to note that it was “horses for courses” when it came to mitigation. He presented a scenario where a 200-hectare farm with an Olsen-P status of 35 (too high) and average slope (10°) and rainfall (900mm) was in an area where streams were choked with weed and algae. A cost/benefit analysis showed that some strategies like decreasing superphosphate inputs, in conjunction with Overseer, were able to decrease phosphorus losses by about 10 percent with a net gain in profit. However, in order to decrease phosphorus enough to stop weed and algae growth, the most cost-effective strategy was to fence off wallows connected to the stream and make a new one unconnected to the stream. 

## COMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Time/Location	Contact for further details
28 August 2009	Combined South Canterbury/North Otago and Canterbury Branch Focus Farm Field Day	North Bank and Mountain River Processors, Rakaia. In attendance, Minister of Agriculture, David Carter Theme: Quality Venison Finishing Systems	Peter Bradley, 027 649 1107, peter@mrbusiness.co.nz
22 October 2009	Canterbury Focus Farm field day	Mendip Hills	Peter Bradley, 027 649 1107, peter@mrbusiness.co.nz
28–29 October 2009	NZDFA Branch Chairmen’s meeting	Wellington: venue to be confirmed	Tony Pearse, 021 719 038, tony.pearse@deernz.org or Hannah Hsu, 04 471 6110, hannah.hsu@deernz.org
28 November 2009	North Island Velvet Competition	The Coachman, Palmerston North	Wilton Turner, 06 328 4771, wapitiwilt@farmside.co.nz
7–10 December 2009	National Velvet Competition	Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill. Guest speaker: Davey Hughes, Swazi.	Southland Branch, NZDFA, janet.horrell@woosh.co.nz
18–20 May 2010	Deer Industry Conference	War Memorial Hall, Napier (field day 20 May at The Steyning, Central Hawke’s Bay)	Tony Pearse, 021 719 038, tony.pearse@deernz.org or Hannah Hsu, 04 471 6110, hannah.hsu@deernz.org
27–28 July 2010	Fifth World Deer Congress. Watch for further information in our October issue on pre/post conference tours	Changchun, China	Tour proposed, via velvet processing centres in China. To register interest contact C Ron McPhail, PO Box 2091, Palmerston North, Ph 06 357 1644, enquiries@crmcphail.co.nz

# Hind sales

## Tower Farms

**6 March 2009:** A small gallery of supporters following safari genetics. Weaner hinds with new blood were the flavour of the day from sires *Discombe*, *Holyoak* and *Zidarn* (a daughter making \$10,000). We sold 24/35 lots. MA hinds \$700–\$3400, weaner hinds \$600–\$10,000.

**3 July 2009:** Excellent sale considering the economic environment. Spirited bidding from 37 registered buyers; safari lines attracted the most attention with good medium support for velvet lines. MA hinds \$800–\$7000 (paid for hind in fawn to *Zidarn*), rising 1 yr hinds \$800–\$3000. Strong after-sale enquiry, 43 lots sold out of 51 presented, average \$2253.

## Rodway Park/Sarnia Deer

**24 July 2009:** We sold 26/34 hinds and weaners yarded, averaging \$1,200 over the entire sale. A normal buying bench for a hind sale, i.e., smaller turnout and good support. Top price \$3,000 for a Woburn hind. The six Woburn hinds all met strong interest with all of them going to a new home at West Bush Deer Stud in Masterton. David Stevens’s Netherdale Stud also purchased six hinds. We didn’t offer any semen this time. A positive result and we are pleased with the support.



## Vaccination makes economic sense: Mackintosh

*Why wouldn't you inoculate your deer against yersiniosis when you can vaccinate 150 animals for less than the cost of losing just one?*

That was the message of Colin Mackintosh's presentation on vaccination to the Deer Industry Technical Conference.

Yersinia caused a high incidence of avoidable scouring and sudden deaths in the April–August period, he said. “Outbreaks affect 5–10 percent of the herd, sometimes as much as 20 percent.

“With vaccination costing \$2 per treatment (two doses three to six weeks apart when weaners are 12+ weeks old) it's cheap insurance against disastrous outbreaks caused by unseasonal weather, feed shortages and other stressors that can't be anticipated. I think Yersiniavax® is currently underutilised, and while it may not be necessary in all farming situations it is certainly an issue every deer farmer should discuss with their veterinarian as part of their overall animal health programme, and weigh up the risks, costs and benefits.”

He presented the conference attendees with a scenario where 10 percent of a mob of 150 unvaccinated weaners died from yersiniosis. With weaners ranging in price from \$250–\$320 this year, that would mean a cost in today's terms of, say, \$4,500, not including losses of yearling venison earnings. If the vaccine was 70 percent effective or better, the cash saving would be at least \$3,000, which would equate to the cost of vaccinating the whole herd for more than 10 years.

He added that it was important to maximise the benefits of vaccination by using it in conjunction with good feeding,

management and shelter. Vaccine sales tended to track the venison price, he said, but it was important to consider vaccination at all times, rather than regard it as an area where corners could be cut when times were tough.

### **Leptospirosis vaccination**

There are plenty of good reasons for vaccinating against leptospirosis too. Colin illustrated that even though only 1 percent of farms experience outbreaks, the result can be up to 10 percent mortality among weaners, not to mention the incidence of abortion in hinds and the risk to human health.

“Once again, vaccination is cheap, varying from \$2–2.80 per two-dose course, so each farmer should assess their own particular risk factors. Vaccination is of course not a panacea but an important part of minimising the disease risk. That risk depends on the history of previous outbreaks, exposure of water to pasture contamination by urine from cattle, sheep, goats or pigs and the introduction of potentially infected deer from off the farm.

“The risk to humans is also serious, as we cannot be vaccinated against leptospirosis and this is why New Zealand dairy herds are intensely vaccinated. Of course deer farmers don't have anything like the same degree of contact with their stock, but the risk is still present and it is a very severe and debilitating illness.”

Management was complicated by the occurrence of three

serovars, the main ones being *hardjobovis* (very widespread and relatively mild), and *pomona*, which was less common, but more pathogenic and liable to cause sporadic outbreaks with more sudden deaths, especially among young deer, and abortions in adult hinds. Pomona also reduced productivity in animals showing no obvious symptoms, and this carried a further cost that might remain unrecognised, Colin said.

He listed three vaccines licensed for use with deer: Leptavoid®2, Leptavoid®3 and Leptosshield®. All were applied in two doses, 4–6 weeks apart, preferably in weaners past 12 weeks of age. In addition, an annual booster to hinds should protect calves up to 12 weeks old through maternal antibodies.

## Clostridial vaccination

Clostridial disease is caused by a range of very persistent and common bacteria that are better known for causing tetanus, pulpy kidney, blackleg and other diseases in sheep and cattle. With deer, clostridia cause sporadic cases or outbreaks of sudden death, enterotoxaemia, and wound infection or post-velvetting infections in stags.


A number of multi-strain vaccines are available and although they are not licensed for use with deer, Colin said it was estimated that about 20 percent of deer farmers used them. "Once again, this is an issue to discuss with your vet. At 30–40 cents a dose, and requiring two shots 4–6 weeks apart, vaccines are once again cheap insurance relative to the value of weaners, breeding hinds, sire stags and velvetting stags. Annual booster vaccinations are also recommended in high-risk situations such as pre-calving and at velvet removal in stags. It is not yet known how long the protective effect of the vaccine lasts, but it is thought to be lower than for sheep and cattle."

## Johne's disease vaccination

Johne's disease vaccines are not yet licensed for use on deer and the cost remains unknown, but vaccination of weaners offers potential as part of a Johne's disease control programme, Colin said.

"The only other control measure is to reduce the prevalence of the disease in hinds through a test-and-slaughter programme using the Paralisa™ test. Vaccination will reduce the severity of the disease and few clinical cases are seen in vaccinated animals. Vaccination offers good possibilities with deer destined only for slaughter. However, on the downside, the Animal Health Board is concerned about vaccination of replacement stock because it sensitises deer to Tb tests and both false positive and false negatives can result. For this reason, it would be very unwise to use vaccination for Johne's in areas where the risk of Tb is high."

## Other vaccinations

Vaccines against fusobacterial abscesses have previously been available for cattle but have now been withdrawn. Though moderately effective in red and fallow, they were not licensed for use with deer. There is no specific vaccine available for deer parapox, which seems largely to have died off, though orf vaccine seems to offer some cross-protection. 

## Puberty enhancement: don't force it

***If you think too many of your R2 hinds are failing to breed, don't be too hard on them: there's sure to be a good biological reason for it.***

That's the take-home message that AgResearch's Geoff Asher was pushing in his presentation on deer puberty at the Deer Industry Technical Conference.


"Puberty failure means something's not right, biologically speaking, and you can't force it without incurring some consequences. Recent studies have shown that on some farms the administration of melatonin can increase the number of R2 hinds getting pregnant, achieved by 'forcing' the smaller hinds to enter puberty. While this is very interesting from a basic science perspective, administering melatonin certainly isn't the answer on the farm. Forcing small hinds to enter puberty will probably be counter-productive.

"If an R2 hind isn't quite up to breeding yet, there will be a simple reason for it, like stress or inadequate nutrition, and she is, biologically speaking, better off delaying her first pregnancy by a year. It's something nature takes care of automatically as a survival mechanism. Because, as with most mammals, the first breeding in females represents the highest risk of mortality, it makes sense to delay it if things are just not quite right. Generally hinds that fail to get pregnant as R2s will comfortably attain puberty a year later as R3s. In reality, about 15 percent of R2s across New Zealand deer farms fail to get pregnant."

However, he added, that figure of 15 percent was across the board and tended to mask a huge variation in R2 breeding success between farms depending on environmental factors.

In the case of breeding failure in young hinds, embryo failure and foetal wastage are the least issues of concern, he said. "Usually the main cause is failure to ovulate, and this is related to photoperiod (day length) and body mass. Both need to be aligned at 16 months of age or there is liable to be a delay of puberty onset to around 27 months of age. The animals need to have attained at least 70 percent of their ultimate bodyweight by 16 months, when the photoperiod is right. Heavier hinds cannot enter puberty earlier because they are constrained by an inappropriate photoperiod."

He added that in the past 30 years the influence of wapiti and Eastern European genes in the New Zealand farmed deer herds had compounded the issue, by driving up the average bodyweight at a given age. "It's too easy to forget that increased average body mass leads to increased breeding expectations by driving up the breeding threshold weight for puberty. While the puberty threshold for Scottish/English breeds is about 70 kg, it is likely to jump to about 80 kg for composites with Eastern European breeding and will be as high as 120–130kg for hybrid hinds that have 50 percent wapiti genes."

Geoff said melatonin offered no solution or panacea: "It's a useful research tool but puberty failure is nature's way of telling you the animal isn't ready and there's likely to be no benefit from forcing it. Forcing pregnancy in underweight or ill-prepared animals simply isn't good practice – it just adds to the stress. The real solution lies in better nutritional and environmental management early in the hind's life so that she can reach her potential for growth and reproductive development as an R2. The fact that many farmers achieve R2 pregnancy rates greater than 95 percent is proof that everyone can do it." 

# Parasite diagnosis remains a challenge

**Progress is gradually being made towards better management and diagnosis of lungworm and gastro-intestinal worms, but they remain the main types of parasite in deer.**

Dr Colin Mackintosh provided the Deer Industry Technical Conference with a concise background on worm parasites in deer and outlined research towards improving faecal egg and larval tests.

He explained how lungworms caused sudden death, ill thrift, reduced growth rates and could predispose animals to yersiniosis. Gastrointestinal worms, especially in the abomasum, caused scouring, ill thrift, reduced growth rates, “fading elk syndrome” and death.

“Both types are best controlled by management and regular or periodic or strategic use of effective anthelmintics (drenches). However, there is a growing concern about over-use of drenches and the development of drench resistance, and a growing desire to make less use of them.

“Lungworms lay eggs in airways, from where they are coughed up, swallowed and then hatch before being voided in the faeces. This life cycle provides the basis for developing faecal larval count (FLC) tests, counting the number of larvae per gram of faeces. The best of these tests have been found to correlate reasonably well with the number of adult worms present in the lungs. However, the drawback is that these tests provide no indication of larval numbers in the lungs at the time of testing. It takes 23 days after hatching for larvae to become adults and start shedding eggs, so they can be present in large numbers while still remaining undetected by the test. This means that, especially in autumn, the test has the potential to lull farmers into a false sense of security at a time when the parasite burden may actually be very high. Thus the FLC test is risky in autumn, even though it is useful in spring/summer.”

Colin said red deer developed some resistance to lungworms over the autumn so these parasites were less a problem in spring/summer, but wapiti were always more susceptible to the parasites and did not develop good immunity.


“Gastrointestinal worms are tricky too. They discharge eggs through the faeces but studies have shown poor correlation between faecal egg count (FEC) and total worm burden. This is because eggs are unevenly distributed through the faeces, being produced irregularly at different times of the day. Also, variations in the resistance of individual deer can produce misleading counts and the different types of worms produce widely varying numbers of eggs. The McMaster test for FEC has poor sensitivity and unknown repeatability. The new FECPAK FEC test offers higher sensitivity.”

Given these challenges, Colin Mackintosh’s research team have been working to develop diagnostic tests that could be used to monitor worm burdens and determine “trigger” levels for drenching. One trial compared the two tests on paired faecal samples from 100 deer in midwinter, to look at differences in sensitivity. It showed the new test was

significantly more sensitive (accurate to within 20 eggs/gram, compared to 100 for the McMaster test). “However there were wide variations with both tests and there still remains no ‘gold standard’ test with which to compare all these results.”

Another test looked at repeatability, to find out whether different people could produce consistent results when testing a series of repeat samples from 12 deer sampled twice. Again the new test showed more consistent figures, but when dealing with high counts it appeared to overestimate the actual numbers present.

A third study was a longitudinal observation looking at how egg counts from the new test correlated with liveweight gain during spring/summer and total worm counts as determined in February after the animals were slaughtered. Disappointingly, the results from these tests did not reveal any clear correlations or patterns.

The overall conclusion was that although the newer FEC test appeared to be more sensitive and repeatable when used on animals with low gastrointestinal parasite levels, it may not be any more useful for estimating worm burdens in 1-year-old red deer with low-to-moderate worm burdens. However, it may still be very useful as a laboratory and experimental tool for better study of the effectiveness of drenches, detecting worm resistance to drenching and to help farmers identify and select deer that are “resilient” to parasites. In conclusion, Colin said the deer farming industry still needed better methods of estimating and monitoring worm burdens. The current industry and FRST-funded programme provides funding and direction for this ongoing work under Objective 2. 

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## Chemistry 101 and fertiliser use

***At the Deer Industry Focus Farm field day at WhiteRock Station, Canterbury, in May this year, Ants Roberts from Ravensdown offered some insights on simple soil chemistry that have a strong application on farms like Whiterock.***

He explained that the hilly soils of the Rangitata Gorge are reasonably fertile and with a pH level around 5.8 to 6 (moderately acidic) this is generally ideal for pasture.

“There is little advantage in driving the pH to a higher level with extra lime unless it is necessary to increase the availability of essential microelements that are unavailable in acidic conditions. Another reason for sweetening acid soils lies in the fact that New Zealand hill and high country soils are often high in aluminium, and at lower pH levels this aluminium is too readily available to plants. Too much aluminium suppresses root-hair development and nutrient uptake as well as making the plants shallow-rooted and more drought prone.”

That means pH, aluminium and calcium all need to be considered together – you can’t look at each in isolation. The importance of the aluminium issue is not nearly widely enough recognised, believes Ants.

Even at Whiterock there are spots where ARL aluminium soil tests are close to 3 at pH 5.5. “Lime increases the net negative charge on soil particles which bind the positive aluminium ions more tightly, making them less available. This correction often makes an amazing difference to clover and ultimately to grass growth.”

In response to a question about measuring pasture quality with a brix meter, Ants said “Brix meters measure sugar content, which can vary on a very short timescale depending on temperature and weather. Sugar content is not a good

proxy for the total nutritional value in pastures. Brix meters, while used successfully in the wine industry, have not been reliably calibrated to measuring sugars in pasture species.”

David Stevens of Invermay commented you can just about tell more from something as simple as the intensity of a field’s green colour.

It’s a myth that fertilisers decrease biological activity in soils, said Ants.


“In fact the opposite is true. By applying fertiliser nutrients to encourage the growth and function of pasture legumes like white clover, the soil is supplied with nitrogen which is fixed by the legumes. This nitrogen forms proteins in the clover which is eaten by farm animals and most is excreted back out as dung or urine onto the soil. Death and decay of plant roots and uneaten pasture also returns nutrients back to the soil. All of these residues are food for everything that lives in the soil.

“Trial work has shown that by increasing pasture productivity through fertiliser use also increases soil biological activity. As pastures are improved, the carbon/nitrogen ratio can fall from 20:1 to 13:1 or even 10:1 on intensively fertilised land like dairy farms. This comes about through increasing the size of the soil nitrogen pool relative to soil carbon. You only have to look at peat to realise that high carbon alone provides no guarantee of high fertility – it’s the nitrogen cycle that is a key driver for pasture production.”

He added that organic matter is lost from soils through biological activity particularly if the soil is cultivated and in dry conditions that tends to slow down or even stop. “Thatch buildup becomes a problem on low-nitrogen soils because there is insufficient nitrogen for the bugs to break it down.”

Asked about the need for nitrification inhibitors, Ants pointed out that most leaching takes place from urine patches, not from added nitrogenous fertilisers. “Urine patches contain the equivalent of between 300 kg N/ha (sheep/deer) up to 1,000 kg N/ha (dairy cows). There’s no way the plants can use it all and the excess may leach over the winter months. Again research has shown that deer-grazed pastures leach less N than sheep- and cattle-grazed pastures.” Ants suggested that this was because deer urinate as they walk – unlike cattle – so they spread it better!

Sulphate is another issue, especially in the South island hill and high country. Plants can only utilise inorganic sulphur (sulphate) and in early spring sulphate availability can become growth limiting. It often leaches like inorganic nitrogen over the winter months, and annual applications are necessary. It helps to supplement sulphate fertilisers with applications of elemental sulphur. Elemental sulphur is food for naturally occurring sulphur-using bacteria (*Thiobacillus* species) in the soil and converted to sulphate which the plants can then use. A bit of both “fast” and “slow” sulphur is good, said Ants.

“Sometimes in spring there still may be plenty in reserve but it’s all tied up in organic forms and conditions are too cold and wet for much microbial activity to free it up. In such conditions, the problem is that the sulphur deficiency can limit the plants’ ability to use added nitrogen.” 

■ **For more articles about the Whiterock field day, see the June 2009 issue of Deer Industry News.**

# New velvet selling structure emerges

**A broader shareholder representation in a reformed New Zealand Velvet Marketing Company appears set to mark a turning point in the history of the New Zealand velvet industry.**

Announcing the new agreement at a pre-season velvet antler seminar at Stanfield's on 4 August, Velexco Chairman, James Guild, said arrangements for the new velvet selling structure had just been concluded the previous day. He told the 150 seminar participants that the new marketing company, New Zealand Velvet Marketing Company Ltd (NZVM) will consist of four equal 25 percent shareholdings by PGG Wrightson, Tasman Velvet Processors, Velexco Co-operative Group Ltd and a new producer co-operative to be known as the Velvet Suppliers Co-operative.

"For the first time in 35 years velvet producers will have an equity interest in a marketing structure dedicated to selling the vast majority of New Zealand's velvet crop. We urge all velvet growers to evaluate the business case this new joint venture presents, and to support the new venture by committing their supply and taking up shares in either of the two new co-ops.

"NZVM, as the name implies, is purely a velvet marketing company, or a broker. As such, it has two groups of clients: the velvet producers and the customers. The important point is that this particular broker is 50 percent owned by deer farmers. As one farmer observed, 'All brokers are bastards – but at least this one is our bastard.'"

James said NZVM would have a sales force of employees and contractors accountable to a board of equal representation from each shareholder, plus an independent chairman.

"NZVM will contract logistical services from a new company, Velvet Logistics Ltd, owned 50/50 by PGG Wrightson and Tasman Velvet. It will also contract velvet collection services from PGG Wrightson and marketing services from Velexco.

"The company will be a true partnership with growers and exporters now working together. It will investigate the opportunity to work much more closely with importers and distributors in the main markets of China, Korea and Taiwan. It will also focus on working with its buyers to increase demand and provide accurate market signals to its suppliers."

He added that much of the NZVM board's initial focus would be on researching innovations and best practice to meet producers' requirements to encourage them to commit velvet and capital to the new company. Already a task force of growers had met to brainstorm ideas on this, and its recommendations would be before the board within a couple of weeks. "NZVM's shareholders are acutely aware that supplier loyalty can't be taken for granted and the new company will have to perform at every stage from farm to pharmacy."

Explaining the background to the new venture, he said Velexco had originally been formed in 1999 as a private company by a group of large-scale velvet producers concerned at the instability and diminishing returns of the velvet sector. They soon reached the conclusion that to effect change Velexco would have to become an active participant in the market, which it did, and it later became a co-operative in 2003.

"During its seven years of trading, Velexco managed every year to increase both its shareholder base and its percentage of the national crop and it exceeded industry average returns. It also introduced innovations like year-round sales, a quality assessment system for every line of velvet, price averaging by grade and contract sales to Korea. However, in only two of the ten years of Velexco's existence did the weighted average returns for velvet exceed the \$100/kg benchmark and in six of those years returns to growers were less than the cost of production. This lack of profitability contributed to Velexco's failure to get the critical farmer and product volumes necessary to force change.

"Other changes over the same period were also mostly negative. There was savage attrition among New Zealand-based processors as frozen exports increased and we witnessed the amalgamation of the two pool operators, PGG and Wrightson, the rise and fall of Velconz, the emergence of China as a direct competitor for Korea, and finally a sizeable fall in New Zealand velvet production – about 40 percent if we include predictions for the forthcoming season."

DINZ CEO, Mark O'Connor, said his organisation supported the new NZVM initiative. "We support anything that brings the industry together to better manage the bringing of velvet to the marketplace." He noted that DINZ Chairman, John Scurr, was very pleased to see the four companies, in particular the two new co-ops, standing shoulder to shoulder at the pre-season seminar and was looking forward to seeing it in action.

"DINZ hopes that NZVM takes a collaborative approach with other players in the velvet industry so others like local Korean processors and other buyers with their own skill sets can also be a positive force in the industry."

NZDFA Executive Committee Chairman, Bill Taylor, said the association was pleased to see the long-awaited establishment which would enable producers to have partial ownership of the marketing structure.

"I see it as positive that all producers will have the opportunity to be involved as



*DINZ CEO, Mark O'Connor, addressing participants at the pre-season velvet seminar held at Stanfield's European Red Deer Stud, Bangor, earlier this month.*

## STOP PRESS:

**NZVM supplier meetings from 25 August to 10 September. See page 23 for details!**

part of one company and hope that by working together the two farmer co-ops will be able to keep duplicated costs to members at an absolute minimum. The challenge will be to communicate effectively to producers regarding the ownership structure and the opportunity it will present.”

### Behaviour change needed

Shareholders in NZVM have given up some of their independence for the greater good and farmers too will have to change their behaviour, said James Guild, announcing the new NZVM venture. “We must face the reality that velvet and venison are not complementary, but compete for the same animal resource. Deer farmers who produce velvet as an incidental, though valuable, by-product from their venison enterprise have a responsibility to sell it in a manner that does not destabilise the whole velvet sector. Demands from growers for instant cash and weekly spot market auctions have no place in a managed supply system. If that behaviour continues it will undermine the reforms NZVM has created.”

## Local Johne’s advice available



*In June this year, 30 advisers – most of them veterinarians – attended a two-day workshop on the management of Johne’s disease in farmed deer under New Zealand pastoral conditions. The workshop was run by Johne’s Management Limited.*

- At the workshop, advisers were provided with:
- a technical manual containing the latest information on the management of Johne’s disease in deer
  - software to assimilate all data associated with Johne’s disease in a deer herd
  - a tutorial from Dr Trevor Cook (winner of the 2008 Landcorp Agricultural Communicator of the Year award) on providing effective consultancy services to farmers.

If you are concerned about Johne’s disease in your deer herd, JML encourages you to contact one of the advisers listed on this page. If your usual deer veterinarian has not yet attended a JML workshop, they can contact JML on (0800) 456 453 for information on the 2010 workshops.

North Island					
	Address	Name	Work phone	Mobile	Email
1	<b>Waiuku Veterinary Centre</b> 17 Kitchener Rd, Waiuku	<b>Tanya Liefiting</b>	09 235 9217	027 497 9719	wku@vetcentre.co.nz
2	<b>Tokoroa Veterinary Services</b> PO Box 637, Taupo	<b>Tony Parsons</b>	07 378 5433	027 445 5202	tonylynne@extra.co.nz
3	<b>Veterinary Services (Hawke’s Bay)</b> PO Box 503, Waipukurau	<b>Richard Hilson</b>	06 858 9060	027 275 3943	richard.hilson@hawkesbayvets.co.nz
4	<b>Totally Vets Limited</b> 43-45 Manchester St, Feilding	<b>Barney Askin</b>	06 323 6161	027 464 9979	barnya@totallyvets.co.nz
South Island					
	Address	Name	Work phone	Mobile	Email
5	<b>Northern Canterbury Veterinary Services</b> PO Box 46, Cheviot	<b>Ian Page</b>	03 319 8677	027 436 0477	ian@ncvets.co.nz
6	<b>Grey Veterinary Centre</b> PO Box 231, Greymouth	<b>Gary Dew</b>	03 768 0370		gary@greyvetcentre.co.nz
7	4a Carruthers St, Ilam, Christchurch	<b>Edmund Noonan*</b>	03 358 8718	027 288 6925	edmund.noonan@gmail.com
8	<b>Xcell Breeding Services</b> PO Box 165, Kaiapoi	<b>Jim McPhee</b>	03 327 9555	021 453 406	jim@xcell.co.nz
9	<b>Darfield Veterinary Centre Ltd</b> 125 Waireka Rd, Darfield	<b>Simon Hewitt</b>	03 318 8611	027 449 1031	darfieldvet@paradise.net.nz
10	<b>Vetlife Dunsandel</b> PO Box 110, Dunsandel	<b>Rebecca Kingan</b>	03 325 4155	027 378 6700	rkingan@gmail.com
11	<b>Riverside Veterinary Services</b> PO Box 211, Ashburton	<b>Rob Dunbar</b>	03 308 2321	027 241 6008	rob.dunbar@vetent.co.nz
12	<b>Vetlife Temuka</b> 35 King St, Temuka	<b>Luisa Ferrer</b> <b>Andrew McLaughlin</b> <b>Phil Skinner</b>	03 615 7352 03 615 7352 03 615 7352	027 229 6350 027 444 0819 027 244 7016	luisa.ferrer@vetlife.co.nz andrewm@vetlife.co.nz phil@vetlife.co.nz
13	<b>Vetlife Pleasant Point</b> 83 Main Rd, Pleasant Point	<b>Katie Bowron</b> <b>Hayden Barker</b> <b>Beatrix Loomes</b>	03 614 7777 03 614 7777 03 614 7777	027 543 2018 027 223 1023 027 444 1202	KTD4000@hotmail.com hayden@vetlife.co.nz vetpoint@gmail.com
14	<b>Aorangi Veterinary Services</b> 27 Wilson St, Geraldine	<b>Glenda Kellahan</b>	03 693 1163	027 477 9216	glenda.k@aorangivet.co.nz
15	<b>Vetlife Fairlie</b> 31 Main St, Fairlie	<b>Georgina Mc Kerchar</b> <b>Dean Dickson*</b>	03 685 8884 03 685 8884	027 484 3001 027 479 8079	georgina@vetlife.co.nz fairlie@vetlife.co.nz
16	<b>Waimate Veterinary Services</b> PO Box 96, Waimate	<b>Eric van Schreven</b>	03 689 7213	027 203 9642	vets@waimatevets.co.nz
17	<b>Aspiring Veterinary Services</b> PO Box 223, Wanaka	<b>Gary Walker</b>	03 443 7262	027 433 5673	aspiring-vet@extra.co.nz
18	<b>Beech Resources Limited</b> PO Box 361, Wanaka	<b>Amanda Bell</b>	03 443 4251	027 443 4250	mandyb@criffell.co.nz
19	<b>Central Vets Limited</b> Stuart Rd, Ranfurly	<b>Dave Dodd</b>	03 444 9615	027 431 7945	kate@centralvets.co.nz
20	<b>AgResearch Invermay</b> Puddle Alley, Mosgiel	<b>Colin Mackintosh</b>	03 489 9229	029 489 9229	colin.mackintosh@agresearch.co.nz
21	<b>Northern Southland Vets (Te Anau)</b> PO Box 65, Riversdale	<b>Paul Langford</b>	03 202 5636		julia@nsvs.co.nz
22	<b>Vet South Ltd Gore</b> PO Box 242, Gore	<b>Gavin Sinclair</b>	03 203 9220	021 222 6153	gavin@vetsouth.co.nz
23	<b>Vet South Ltd Winton</b> PO Box 12, Winton	<b>Andrew Roe</b>	03 236 6090	021 710 068	andrewr@vetsouth.co.nz
24	<b>Veterinary Services Invercargill</b> 299 North Rd, Invercargill	<b>Glenn Dean</b>	03 215 9237	027 231 6599	glenn@vetservices.co.nz
25	<b>AsureQuality Limited</b> PO Box 644, Invercargill	<b>Lester Laughton</b>	03 214 6757	021 888 145	laughton@asurequality.co.nz

\* not a veterinarian

## Venison

**A strengthening New Zealand dollar and subdued restaurant demand in the main markets suggests we are unlikely to see a strong lift in prices during spring. A positive indicator from recent production statistics has been a lower hind kill, which suggests that some herd rebuilding is under way. Fragility in the economies of Germany and the United States continues to overshadow prospects in our main markets.**

### Production

With many plants closed for seasonal maintenance, venison production through June and July has reportedly reached multi-year low levels. Production for the 12 months to 30 April was 29,500 tonnes, 13 percent lower than in 2008.

One very positive indicator is the reduction in the hind kill. Hind throughput is 78,000 lower than in 2008; as a percentage, hind kill is 48 percent for the year to date, down from an average of 54 percent over the period when the national herd was in decline.

### Exports

Reflecting the slow-down in production, exports in the 12 months ending April fell 15 percent to 18,000 tonnes, worth \$310 million. This is the lowest volume since 2003. Export returns for the 12-month period continued to reflect the strong international prices with the average FOB value of New Zealand venison at \$17,200 per tonne, up 38 percent on the previous year.

### Exchange rate

Since reaching its lows in March, the NZD has appreciated 15 percent against the Euro. To put this into perspective, if a New Zealand bone-in haunch sells for €6/kg, New Zealand would have received \$15.38 in March, but now would receive \$13.00. The appreciation has effectively taken about \$1.50 out of a hypothetical

schedule since March.

While the New Zealand Treasury was assuming a USD at 50 and a Euro at about 40 in 2010, some currency commentators note that a pullback for the NZD now seems increasingly unlikely as the increased appetite for risk among global commodity traders is seeing them take a punt on the New Zealand dollar.

### Schedule

In week beginning 27 July the national average schedule for AP stags, 55–60kg was \$8.75. This was 8 percent above the same week in 2008 and 40 percent above the 5-year average. After dipping to \$7.99 in January, the schedule held up well through early 2009 thanks to a weak New Zealand dollar and adequate demand from international markets.

With market prices on par with last year, and the Euro about the same value as this time last year, a schedule 8 percent above where it was last year looks fully priced. With continued currency appreciation, and chilled prices unlikely to hit last year's levels, the industry may not see the spring lift some had anticipated, or to the same extent as in recent years.

### Market conditions

In the main German market, with temperatures in the 20s and summer holidays still to be taken, chefs and hoteliers are not concerning themselves with whether they will buy venison for

their autumn menus. Most restaurateurs are staring at half-empty restaurants and customers ordering the cheapest main with a glass of water. Many aren't wondering how to make their menus innovative or exciting – they are wondering how they are going to pay their rent and staff.

While some are claiming to see the elusive "green shoots" in some European economies, the continued worries about future employment, the deterioration of savings, and "recession guilt" mean people are spending less on restaurant meals and on expensive proteins.

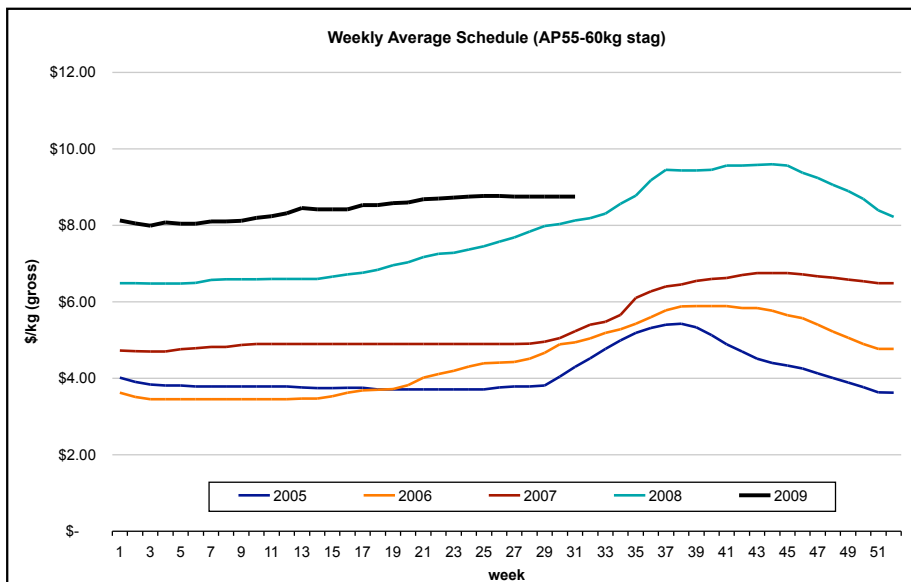
Projections for Germany forecast a 6 percent contraction in GDP for 2009, and probably 0 percent growth in 2010.

In North America, the restaurant trade is suffering badly, and suppliers of expensive proteins are witnessing the consequences. In the United States, more than 4,000 restaurants have closed down this year. The most heavily hit sector has been the independents. These are mostly fine dining, owner/operator businesses, and prime customers of New Zealand venison.

Another factor creating difficulties for our customers is the contraction in credit. Nearly all wholesaling companies have had their credit facilities reduced, which means they have to sell their stocks to generate cash-flow and hold lower inventories. Wholesalers who would normally be acquiring venison now for the coming game season are not doing so because they do not have the credit facilities to fund their purchases. Importers who have already committed to purchasing their venison from New Zealand are therefore carrying the risk that the volumes they have purchased are not picked up by the trade in the months ahead.

### Recent promotion activities

- CDU barbecue: New Zealand venison was again a feature at the Christian Democratic Union summer barbecue in Berlin. We were invited back after the attendees enjoyed the venison they were served last year. And although we didn't get a picture of German Chancellor Angela Merkel sampling New Zealand venison again this year, several hundred of her parliamentary



Source: Agrifax



Christian Democratic Union parliamentarians queue for a taste of New Zealand venison at their recent summer barbecue in Berlin.

colleagues did enjoy our product.

- **Retail tastings** continue, although at lower numbers over the summer. Recent events have taken place with Citti stores in Flensburg, Berlin, Ulm and Rostock. New Zealand chefs based in the United Kingdom have conducted tastings and cooking demonstrations for trade and consumers at cash and carries in Germany in the past few months. Twenty-two days of retail tastings are scheduled for the next few months at stores in cities like Berlin, Dresden and Munich.
- A new German **recipe flier** has been produced and distributed among importers for retail display later in the year. Three companies have asked for the brochure to be customised with their own company brands and contact details.
- **Press releases** on chefs using New Zealand venison and on New Zealand deer farming have been distributed among consumer and trade press in Germany in time for editions to print the material in the lead-up to the game season.
- DINZ maintains New Zealand venison **websites** in German, French, Dutch, Italian, Danish and Swedish. Recent additions include cooking and cutting videos in these languages (see [www.neuseelandhirsch.de](http://www.neuseelandhirsch.de)).



German-language version of the New Zealand venison website.

# Velvet

**Low stocks in New Zealand and Korea, an expected drop in velvet production, an improving Korean economy and China's continued growth are positive indicators, although there are still many unknowns which may affect the outcome of the new season. Preparation of appropriate marketing materials in time for the start of next season is underway.**

## Global velvet stocks

Reports are coming in that velvet production from competitors is back on last year, particularly in North America. These, coupled with reportedly low stocks in New Zealand and Korea, are good indicators for the season ahead. The unknown factors are:

- consumer confidence
- velvet stocks currently held in China.

Some exporters comment that there is no more velvet than in previous years and that inventory levels may be down.

## Korean economy

Prominent Korean newspapers report that the recession may be over in Korea, with the focus now on the speed of recovery. Early indicators are positive, and some reports suggest a "V"-shaped recovery (see Market Report in *Deer Industry News*, April 2009, page 18).

Investment banks have revised their outlook for the Korean economy this year, to an average of -2.5 percent GDP growth, an improvement from earlier predictions of -4 percent.

While the OECD agrees that the Korean economy has met its low point and should slowly recover, they caution that Korea may still face some downside risks such as a worsening job market and continued financial issues with trading partners.

Some importers comment that general velvet consumption declined last season, reportedly due to the economic climate. This is supported

by Korean import statistics showing the value of imports down around 25 percent on the rolling year end April 2009.

The New Zealand dollar has appreciated against the Korean won over recent months, by around 10 percent.

## Korea and China

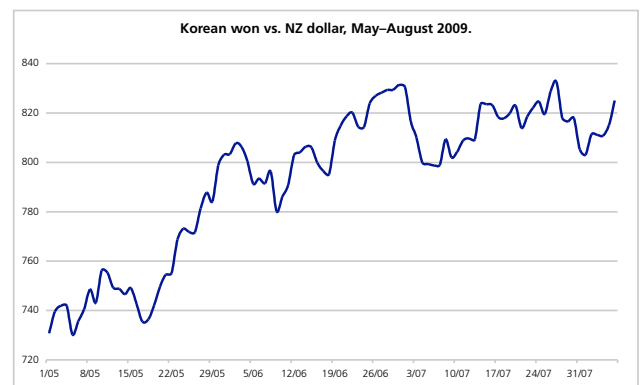
As expected at this time of year (off peak), promotional activity has been very quiet in our main markets.

To prepare for the coming season, DINZ

is translating the Velvet Technical Manual into Korean, simplified Chinese (for Taiwan and Hong Kong) and traditional Chinese (for mainland China). This project requires expertise in science and translation to ensure the manual is correct and understandable.

Work has started on promotional material highlighting velvet's benefits for people. The material will complement the companion animal brochures and Technical Manual produced earlier this year. The plan is to create a suite of marketing materials, available to stakeholders to promote New Zealand deer velvet. In line with the new strategic intent, the collateral will focus on Asian markets, as well as supporting markets in the West.

A brief has been written for a Chinese version of the New Zealand velvet website to provide a web presence as a general information source on New Zealand velvet in China. As China rapidly increases its significance as a market for New Zealand velvet, the industry needs to have the right tools in place for information seekers to understand velvet's role in Traditional Chinese Medicine and, importantly, New Zealand velvet's benefits.



## New Zealand–Korea FTA

The first round of negotiations concluded in early June in Seoul. Lead negotiator, Alison Mann, was positive after the first meeting, but highlighted that significant work lies ahead. The first round of offers will be presented on 2 September, prior to the second round of negotiations scheduled to start 14 September. It is expected more detail should emerge after this. Alison Mann said the deer industry was one of four industries of focus.

# Market focus: Germany

In a new feature for *Deer Industry News*, over the next few issues we'll take a closer look at the New Zealand deer industry's most important markets. In this first column we look at our number one market: Germany.

## Importance to the New Zealand deer industry

Much is made of the need to reduce the industry's reliance on the German market, yet it would be a mistake to think that New Zealand wants to avoid sending venison to Germany at all.

Germany remains the most important market. Of every 5kg of venison produced, 2kg will be eaten by someone in Germany, and Germans have the purchasing power, and the affinity with venison to reward New Zealand deer farmers for producing a quality product.

## Exports to Germany

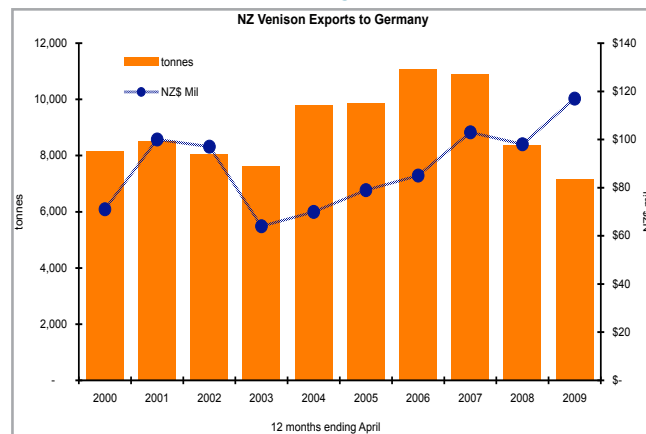


Figure 1: New Zealand venison exports to Germany by volume and value, 2000–2009

As shown in Figure 1, the value of Germany to the New Zealand venison industry has steadily been increasing. New Zealand received \$117 million for direct exports to Germany in the past 12 months, the highest value ever. Yet at the same time, reliance on Germany has decreased. In 2003, when total exports were at a similar level, Germany accounted for 48 percent of New Zealand exports; in the past 12 months, Germany received only 38 percent of our venison exports.

## So why is Germany the number one market?

### Population: 82 million

With a population of around 82 million, Germany is the largest country in Europe, and with an average income of over €40,000, one of the richest too.

Germans like their meat. Average consumption is not the highest in the world – Argentineans chomp their way through over 100kg per annum – but at 87kg per annum it is substantial. As a trading nation, Germans are generally comfortable with consuming imported food products.

Game meat does not figure in national statistics as it is too small to be categorised, but consumption is estimated at





about 40,000 tonnes per annum. Of this, about 20,000 tonnes is estimated to be venison, and about half of this comes from New Zealand.

Consumer studies show that only around 30 percent of the population would consider themselves “venison consumers” but that this segment of 25 million people are predominantly among the more affluent and higher education segments of society.

**Tradition**

Game meats are expected at certain times of the year. The “game season” is the time when supermarkets make a feature of the arrival of a wide variety of hunted game meats – wild boar, European roe and red deer and pheasants from Scotland are all shot in the first weeks of October when the various hunting seasons open. New Zealand venison sits firmly in the game category and benefits from the spike in interest the opening of the hunting seasons creates.

**Distribution**

New Zealand has a long history of supplying meat to Germany, and while some of the companies have changed over the years, strong business relationships have built up between New Zealand exporters and German importers (Figure 2).

Meat is a perishable product; each partner in the chain carries the responsibility to deliver the product in the best condition to their customers. German importers and distributors have the systems and distribution networks in place to rapidly sell large volumes of New Zealand venison. Without the services provided by importers and distributors, New Zealand exporters would never have the capacity to reach the thousands of end users and supermarkets outlets that must be supplied with fresh deliveries, sometimes on a daily basis.

It is estimated that 75 percent of New Zealand venison is consumed in restaurants and institutional catering establishments such as factory canteens and airlines, and about 25 percent sold via retail outlets for home consumption. But the figures are not precise.

The final point of sale of much New Zealand venison is through cash and carries. These are member-only supermarkets, primarily set up to supply businesses with bulk goods at wholesale prices, but members of the public also do their weekly grocery shopping there. Chains like Metro, Fegro and Citti in Germany are significant sellers of

New Zealand venison.

A large proportion of whole leg muscles, forequarter and diced venison exported in bulk form will be used by manufacturers to prepare retail items like ready-to-cook meals, goulash packs and dried meats. These items, alongside chilled venison sold over-the-counter and venison cuts in the freezers, represent the retail presence for New Zealand venison. Supermarket chains such as Rewe and Hit, and up-market department stores like Karstadt and Karhof stock New Zealand venison occasionally.

The New Zealand deer industry depends on Germany. The seasonal game meats trade remains the cornerstone of demand, with the strong tradition of having venison on autumnal menus providing the New Zealand industry with a very certain and affluent market. This is the sector that will pay the best price for the largest volume of New Zealand venison. As a seasonal specialty, chefs are able to absorb higher prices to have it on their menus for a short period of time. Venison remains a special occasion meat, and it would be a mistake to try and make it an every-day meat, which would then be competing with the cheaper proteins.

New Zealand marketing companies must therefore strike a delicate balance between keeping venison as a specialty, available in sufficient quantities when customers want it the most, and at the same time, creating demand year round to better fit our production systems.

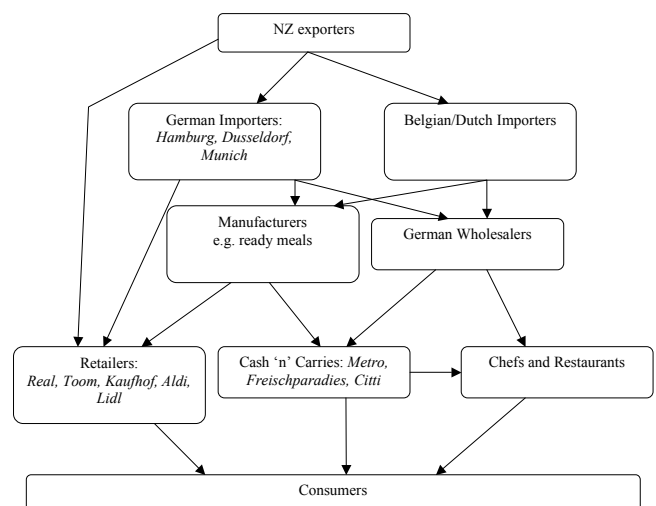


Figure 2: From farm to fork – the venison distribution chain to German consumers.

## Food service promotion important this season

**While the reduction in New Zealand production has led some to comment that this must mean that money doesn't have to be spent promoting New Zealand venison, this is a short-sighted view, that assumes demand for New Zealand venison is constant, and that promotion is only undertaken to boost sales.**

The New Zealand industry's promotions are undertaken to position New Zealand venison as a nutritious 12-month red meat option to grow demand beyond the seasonal German restaurant trade.

Establishing the reputation of New Zealand farm-raised venison as a safe, nutritious and delicious food is an on-going requirement. Awareness of availability and a positive disposition toward New Zealand venison is not a constant state. Individuals move in and out of buying positions, or are attracted to other products by marketing campaigns and changes in trends and fashion.

At the present time, with the very real likelihood of significant falls in restaurant sales in Germany and other markets, we cannot assume that demand for New Zealand venison will outstrip supply this year. Latest statistics from Germany indicate a 7 percent fall in restaurant turnover, but this will understate the impact on higher-priced proteins as nearly all restaurants have down-graded their menus to offer cheaper options to attract buyers. The drop in demand for New Zealand venison is likely to be substantial.

Even if demand does exceed supply, this is a desirable position to be in, and always better than when supply exceeds demand. At the moment, distributors would rather disappoint a potential customer by not having the product on hand, rather than be left with stocks at the end of their expiry period.

DINZ and venison marketing managers regularly assess the market situation and DINZ has moved quickly to change the type of promotion being undertaken to reflect the market needs. While consumer promotion remains a core target, as 2009 has progressed it has become more necessary to support the sale of venison to the food service sector when chefs may have been turned



off the product because of the high prices it reached in 2008. At the same time, the falling availability of venison has meant that fewer stores in Germany have stocked venison, so the need for in-store promotion has reduced.

In the build up to the 2009 game season, advertising to stimulate interest in New Zealand venison will feature in a selection of German chefs' magazines. These advertisements are supported by a direct mail campaign to over 3,800 chefs, and ongoing placement of recipes and editorials promoting the quality of New Zealand venison.

These actions will be matched by German importers who are undertaking their own promotions at chefs' fairs, via cash and carries and direct business-to-business advertising.

Similar activities will be run in Belgium and the Netherlands, important markets for expensive middle cuts. Advertisements and editorials are being placed in the main food service magazines in the next month or two, aimed at prompting chefs to make sure they order their venison early. Again, these will be linked with individual sales activities planned by importers and their distributors; these include articles in distributors' newsletters, features in magazines and sales promotions.

With exports of chilled venison to Belgium, The Netherlands

and Germany over the game season worth approximately NZ\$40 million, spending NZ\$200,000 to make sure chefs are provided with positive messages about New Zealand venison, and think about buying New Zealand venison, is a very wise investment in the current climate. 



# Simplicity key to inspiring recipe collection

■ Reviewed by Shirley Bradstock

This new edition of the book first published in 1982 will help to lift cooks out of the “we need to stew venison” mindset by introducing other inspiring ways of cooking and using venison.

*An Introduction to Venison Cuisine* tantalises the reader with mouth-watering photos, provides a wide range of easy-to-follow recipes and features a useful range of sauces and accompaniments.

Most importantly, John Cornish does what a good chef should do: shows us how best to treat venison. He introduces us to cross-cultural recipes that bring out the best in this fine-textured, sweet and lean meat. With recipes such as Carpaccio of venison, Planked T-bone steak and Schnitzel with piquant butter, he showcases the versatility of venison. And yes, there are stews and slow-cooked recipes too, because these are still great ways to use this fine beast. A couple of classic slow-cooked recipes are Osso buco and Venison goulash. And oh, his venison steak-and-kidney pie...

True to John’s philosophy that simplicity is the key, his recipes are easy to follow and the results are delicious.

Above all, this book will help encourage rank-and-file Kiwis to try more venison and help them to avoid pitfalls like overcooking.

Ingredients are straightforward and easily obtained; in fact many people will already have what they need in their pantry. So let’s hope they’ll now go out and get their venison! 📖

*An Introduction to Venison Cuisine*, by John Cornish is published by Firelight Foods Ltd. It is available for \$20.00 + \$5 postage through [john.cornish@clear.net.nz](mailto:john.cornish@clear.net.nz)

■ Shirley Bradstock is a Christchurch chef and food writer, who also makes the *Shirley’s Kitchen* range of gourmet foods.



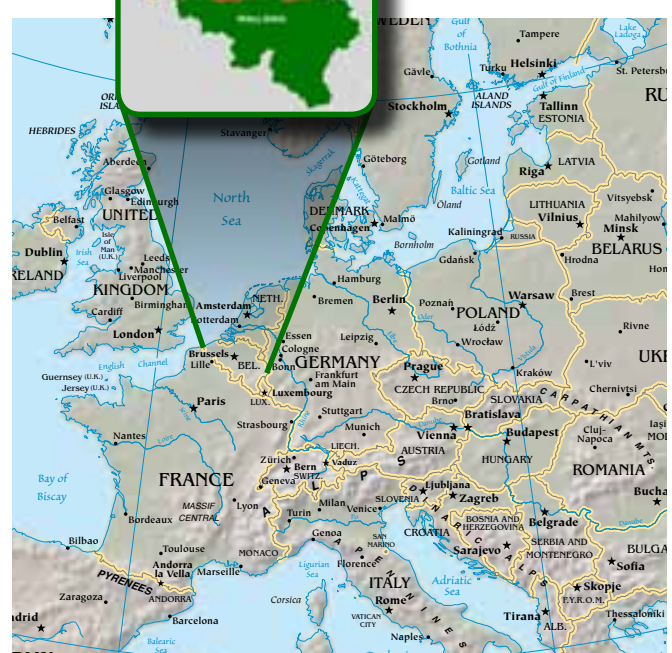
## Belgian seasonal sales restrictions partially lifted

New Zealand has finally secured a success of sorts with the removal of seasonal sales restrictions in part of Belgium. While venison can be imported into Belgium at any time of year, it can only be sold to the public during a regulated hunting season. The hunting regulations are maintained separately by the three states of Belgium: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the northwest, the bilingual Brussels Capital in the centre and French-speaking Wallonia in the southeast.

The restrictions have been in place nominally to protect local wild deer populations from over-hunting and poaching. But with virtually no deer in Flanders or Brussels Capital the suggestion that restricting trade protected the wildlife was not supportable. New Zealand government officials, supported by representations from Belgian importers and, most notably, Belgian Deer Farmers Association Chairman, Paul Audenaerde, have all joined with the Deer Industry New Zealand executive over the past few years to get these sales restrictions removed.

New Zealand has finally had success with an amendment to the Flemish hunting regulation about to be passed which will allow farmed or imported venison to be sold at any time. Efforts will now focus on the other two regional administrations to get them to relax their rules.

No-one is expecting a surge of consumption outside the hunting season. Venison remains a very traditional ingredient in Belgian cuisine. Virtually all New Zealand venison consumed in Belgium is sold through restaurants, with limited retail exposure. 📖




# New nutrition promotion material produced

DINZ has produced two new tools to spread the message that venison is 'the' healthy red meat.

A new consumer brochure has been written and distributed to companies supplying the local market. It is hoped that the elegant design will catch consumer attention in supermarkets to give venison a boost in supermarkets around the country. Companies like Woodburn Venison from Hawke's Bay supply supermarkets nationwide.

To address the health professional audience, a referenced booklet, outlining why venison should form part of a healthy diet, has been produced and is being distributed to dietitians, nutritionists and GPs around the country.

DINZ is also communicating the message directly to people who need low-fat diets. An article and recipe will soon feature in the New Zealand Diabetes Association magazine, reinforcing the low-fat and low-cholesterol content of readily available venison, which makes it an ideal meat for those who must watch their energy intakes carefully.

The resources have been written by Wellington dietician, Amanda Johnston, who has recently completed a substantial review of red meat nutrition and produced a publication call the Role of Red Meat in a Healthy diet. 




## New Cervena® recipe booklet

Cervena licensees have produced a new recipe booklet for the professional food service sector in North America. Using recipes from US chefs, who are big fans of Cervena, the booklet is being used at trade fairs and at promotion events being run by the importers.

Several licensees have also produced their own customised versions with specific cut and contact information.

DINZ will be using this as a mail-out to chefs who make enquiries about Cervena via the website or via advertising in food service magazines.

To see a new presentation go to [www.cervena.com](http://www.cervena.com). Click on "Cervena Resources" and then on "Open Publication" 

For more information about Cervena and its licensed brands, please visit the following websites:

 <a href="http://www.silverfernfarms.com">www.silverfernfarms.com</a>	 <a href="http://www.broadleafgame.com">www.broadleafgame.com</a>	 <a href="http://www.alliance.co.nz">www.alliance.co.nz</a>	 <a href="http://www.mauritiniivenison.co.nz">www.mauritiniivenison.co.nz</a>
 <a href="http://www.duncancervena.com">www.duncancervena.com</a>	 <a href="http://www.dartagan.com">www.dartagan.com</a>	 <a href="http://www.royalcuisine.co.nz">www.royalcuisine.co.nz</a>	 <a href="http://www.nzlamb.com">www.nzlamb.com</a>

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For more information on Cervena, please visit our website  
[www.cervena.com](http://www.cervena.com)



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# Pasture monitoring key part of northern Focus Farm programme

**Continual development and experimentation across a complex set of parameters are some of the features of David Dewar's Focus Farm at Ngakuru, near Rotorua, which he farms with his partner Kay Garland.**

The aim of Focus Farms is to combine ideas to optimise production as a template for other deer farmers to adopt. At Ngakuru, which is the Northern Region Focus Farm, progress towards the goal of "heavier, earlier" depends on constant trial and innovation with stock composition, feed regimes, spray topping, vaccination and drenching regimes, and monitoring and recording.

Development has been a long and gradual process that he couldn't have done without his regular job doing shift work at the Kinleith mill, David says. The income from his job has provided development capital, plus a four-days-on, four-days-off roster gives him the necessary time and flexibility to work on the land, while Kay is full-time on the land.

"The farm was established in 1994 when I shifted from Tokoroa where previously I had 20 acres of deer while working at Kinleith. The gap between farm income and costs has progressively closed and it has now been yielding a good cashflow to pay its way for quite a while.

"Only a half of it was fenced when I bought it, so I gradually fenced the rest and divided it into paddocks. Then I bought more land across the road in about 2000 and fenced it for deer about 2002-04."



*Farmers discuss swedes, the schedule, spring prospects and when to sell at the Northern Regions Focus Farm field day on the Dewars' farm on 12 August. The field day also featured scanning results, weaner growth rate information, a demonstration of RFID tags and associated scanning and weighing systems, and an update on Johnhe's disease research.*

David subsequently sold off a bit and the farm now consists of 149 hectares of free-draining rolling to moderate hill pumice country, mostly in deer plus a few sheep and cattle. Most of the land is divided into smaller deer-fenced paddocks.

The farm used to winter up to 700 hinds but has recently concentrated on buying and finishing yearlings. Winter stocking rate is 16-18 su/ha.

When it comes to making optimal use of feed, David has a bit of a juggling act between demand and supply. "By Christmas, two-thirds of the mouths have gone and with the pressure off, the feed gets away and the quality drops. In the past I've fattened lambs on this and I've recently looked at bringing in cattle seasonally, as weaners have been in short supply and this would improve feed quality, but there's not much money in it."

A large part of management is focused on pasture monitoring and utilisation and cropping for summer systems to increase autumn weight gains. Spray topping is an important method of pasture management, which entails low-dose Roundup application in spring. This does not kill the pasture but merely suppresses seedhead formation, meaning less stalk and more leaf production as summer advances, and works

very well, David says. Some patches are left unsprayed to provide cover for fawns.

Prospects for making silage are a bit limited as it's a bit difficult shutting up large areas of ground early enough to get two cuts while also finishing weaners up to at least the end of September, he says. "Only about 10 hectares is suitable for silage but you need to shut the paddocks off early and still get good rainfall to have any chance of getting that crucial second cut."

Drought has been a problem, with the 2007-08 season a case in point: overall pasture growth was down 17 percent, and from February to August pasture cover was very low. With the farm running 250 breeding hinds and wintering 670 weaners, supplementary feeding was necessary and about 80 tonnes of palm kernel was fed from April to September 2008. This yielded good results as weaner weights averaged around 50kg at sale, with a mean sale date of 27 December. David notes that to achieve 15%+ of yearlings sold before November and a mean sale date of 3 December, the animals have to grow 400g/day from September to November, but the actual



*An excellent crop of swedes behind the break.*

growth rate is more like 300g/day. Also 300 ewes were run. The latest season started a bit slowly but was good through summer and autumn. Fawning rates have improved from 88 to 91 percent between 2005 and 2007 and liveweight gains are progressively becoming realised earlier in the year.

Forage crops are an area where David is continuing to experiment, with swedes as winter crop succeeded by spring-planted forage crops such as pasja and rape. His hinds are wintered mainly on a 5 hectare swede crop. Dry matter production of both forage and pasture is closely monitored, and reveals a peak in pasture production in December at 45kg DM/ha/d, dropping away to a minimum of 8kg in July.

The farm has a history of low copper, hence supplements are used and closely monitored both by biopsy and by post-slaughter analysis.

Timing and frequency of drenching are also key decisions. The weaners were drenched only three times last year. David reckons the crucial drenching is against lungworm at the beginning of winter, as it seems a good hit at this time can remove the need to continue drenching through winter. "The cost of faecal egg and larval counts is almost as high as drenching, so for ease of management you might as well drench anyway in an operation this size. There's a need for a more cost-effective test."

Velvet is a handy extra earner but not a major part of overall income with only 23 stags on the property.

Invermay scientist David Stevens has been helping evaluate feeding management and improved growth rates. Focus is on good-conditioned, optimally fed hinds for better lactation and better weight gain to weaning, and vet Robin Hopkirk keeps an eye on animal health. An intensive vaccination programme has been in place since last year



*RFID tags are being used on weaners as part of a demonstration sponsored by Allflex, ALEIS and TruTest.*

when some yersinia-infected stock were accidentally introduced, and an earlier problem with blackleg in 2004 has been eliminated. 📺


## POSITION WANTED

Young, hard-working couple with real interest in deer seek position with opportunity to progress to a management role on a deer, beef and sheep property. Referees available. Contact David O'Sullivan, Haldon Station, Private Bag, Fairlie, ph 03 680 6639 or email: [davoe@hotmail.com](mailto:davoe@hotmail.com)

## The genetics of temperament

Are deer becoming tamer, easier to handle, more docile? These important questions in the era of adapting once-wild animals to the farm pose problems of definition and effective study, AgResearch scientist Jason Archer told the Deer Industry Technical Conference.

“But the best advice is still to continue culling vigorously on temperament. Although there can be little doubt that some behaviour is hereditary, as shown by differences between red deer and wapiti, it’s still difficult to nail down what’s hereditary and what’s environmental, like learned behaviour passed from hind to calf. Separating these effects requires good ways of measuring temperament.”

As a result, it remains a real challenge to find and define indices by which temperament can be objectively or practically measured, he said. “This means it is questionable whether an objective approach to determining temperament adds any value over the current approach to culling. If the goal of culling is to improve safety, then you should cull just as much to eliminate extremes of nervous behaviour as to eliminate aggressive behaviour. The ideal animal should be both calm and confident.” 


## Wound healing product a step closer

**The treatment of wounds using the deer velvet product RepairRx will be tested on humans thanks to an investment by AgResearch, DINZ and their joint venture company Velvet Antler New Zealand Ltd (VARNZ).**

“If trials are successful we will seek commercialisation of what could be a significant breakthrough in treatment of some types of chronic wounds,” said Dr Jimmy Suttie, Science and Technology General Manager of AgResearch’s Applied Biotechnologies Group. “While any benefits of this work are some time away there is real potential for alleviating human suffering. This is a great example of where industry and science have worked in true partnership to develop the product and we are now continuing with that collaborative effort to get the product to the next stage.”

DINZ CEO, Mark O’Connor said the objective is to generate a significant return from an investment in RepairRx, for deer farmers, for the industry and for people with medical issues. “If this venture is successful it will increase demand, increase prices and open up new markets for the product.”

All partners are aware that the product has a long way to go and could fail, but results of tests over recent years have been positive and give grounds for this further trial. If initial human testing is successful, clinical trials would be expected in 2012, with further success in these leading to full commercialisation around 2014–16.

VARNZ Chairman William Rolleston applauded the decision by AgResearch. While the direct return to the Crown research institute may be limited, the benefit to the deer industry and New Zealand would be significant, he said. 



There was stunning weather and a good turnout at the Central Regions Focus Farm field day at John and Marie Spiers’ Maranoa property at Takapau, Hawke’s Bay, on 11 August. Discussions focused on scanning, R2 hind mating, drench resistance, Tb and the current state of the venison and velvet markets. Pictured here, visitors also took time to take a look at the chicory/clover pasture at Maranoa.



### Inviting All Deer Velvet Suppliers

All velvet producers welcome. Speakers representing NZ Velvet Marketing Ltd and PGG Wrightson Ltd will be present. Light refreshments provided.

#### August

- Tue 25th Feilding 12.30pm – Feilding Golf Club  
Waipukurau 6.30pm – Waipukurau Club
- Wed 26th Rotorua 12pm – Geysersland Hotel  
Hamilton 6pm – The Veranda
- Thur 27th Warkworth 12pm – Walton Park Motor Lodge
- Mon 31st Te Anau 8pm – Te Anau Club

#### September

- Tue 1st Gore 12.30pm – Town & Country Club  
Winton 7pm – The Middle Pub
- Wed 2nd Cromwell 12pm – The Golden Gates  
Mosgiel 6pm – Hotel Taieri
- Thur 3rd Pleasant Point 12pm – The Poplars  
Methven 6pm – The Blue Pub
- Fri 4th Oxford Workingman’s Club 12pm
- Wed 9th Greta Valley 12pm – Greta Valley Hotel  
Kaikoura 6pm – The Lobster Inn
- Thur 10th Blenheim 12pm – The Chateau Marlborough  
Richmond 6pm – Richmond Veterinary Centre

#### Further Inquiries

- Tony Cochrane (South Island) 027 5918 438
- Gordon Herrington (North Island) 027 597 4591
- Or your local PGW Deer Specialist

**PGG Wrightson**