

# **Client Report**

Prepared for DEEResearch

August 2003

## **Deer Workforce Review**

Ian Tarbotton, Louise Hanlon

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# **1 Executive Summary**

## **1.1 Farm Employment**

It is generally agreed that the type of staff needed on deer farms differs from that of other pastoral farms (of which deer farming is a subset). The essential requirements for these staff are good stockman-ship and an enthusiasm for deer.

However farmers interviewed felt that the quantity and quality of applicants has decreased over the last three years. This decrease in quality has to a large extent been identified as a direct result of a decrease in quantity. Therefore, as there are too few applicants farmers are unable to select the staff they desire.. Furthermore, deer farm staff are considered to be an ageing population and there are only a few job applicants in both the young age group (<30), and between 30-40 years. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that the problems in recruiting staff are not particular to the deer industry, and affect the entire pastoral sector, as well as other primary industries.

Additionally, to improve staff retention farmers need to be more professional in their management of staff and this will not improve until respect for staff increases. Poor attitudes towards pay, working conditions, provision of training opportunities and the sharing of farm data are some of the factors that reflect the farmer's attitude towards their staff. These things were reported to be of some concern to a number of the farmers interviewed.

## **1.2 Processor Employment**

The interviewees all believed that greater levels of skills are needed in the deer processing workforce as compared with sheep or cattle processing. This difference arises because of the sophistication of the final product as well as a higher proportion of boners and trimmers being required.

It was also believed that the quality of employees has increased as requirements for value added venison products has increased. Both the quantity and quality of job applicants is currently perceived as sufficient but the respondents could see future shortages are likely. A reason identified for why the number of job applicants were affected is because of the location of the plants, being some distance from urban centres.

### **1.3 How can the industry help?**

The Deer Industry should have an individual who coordinates Deer Industry workforce monitoring and activities. This would include awareness of legislation, knowledge of applicable research and provision of tools or advice about on-farm human resources. This person would be the point of call for other industries and potentially for deer farmers themselves needing particular advice or tools e.g. for recruiting and staff management.

Furthermore, the promotion of pastoral farming as an attractive career path and ensuring deer farming is incorporated into agricultural training courses especially at the tertiary level, needs focus. It would also be worthwhile to have deer farming included as a category within a wider range of research areas e.g. from the Statistics NZ surveys through to training needs surveys.

### **1.4 Further Research**

No deer workforce research was revealed during this review. For this reason a crucial action in this area is to maintain active involvement in the pan-industry Human Capability in Agriculture Group. This group has industry endorsement and a MAF Sustainable Farming Fund grant of \$500 000 and priority projects are currently being undertaken in line with a strategy this group developed.

Some further areas of research may include:

- Research to more clearly define and describe the New Zealand deer industry workforce. This would need to quantify the number of deer enterprises, what other farming it is associated with, staffing levels, use of casual staff or contractors and trends occurring.
- Development of Deer Industry career paths and the competency requirements for various deer farming positions. Position descriptions are needed with competency requirements outlined.
- Identification of what attracts staff to deer farm employment.
- Comparative analysis of staff satisfaction on farms with formal human resource management practices as compared to those with none.
- Learning Needs Analysis of deer farmers and staff to ensure training support is available. Piloting of training to fulfil the needs identified.
- Analysis of staff turn-over to identify areas for improvement.
- The assessment of the apparent lack of information suited to new entrants in deer farming and the flow effects of this.

- What do livestock farmers beginning to farm deer need to know? Where do they seek information from? What short course training can they do?

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Aims**

To interview deer industry representatives including: farmers, processors, vets, consultants and researchers, and to conduct a literature review, in order to:

- assess the current state of the deer farm and processing workforce
- identify any current research and relevant programs
- identify links to other initiatives in the pastoral industry as a whole
- identify research topics and priorities to overcome current and future workforce gaps of significance in the deer industry

### **2.2 Methodology**

#### **Literature Review**

The literature review was undertaken by identifying key written information sources applicable to the review. The Human Capability in Agriculture Group is commissioning both a research and a non-research stocktake in 2003/04 in order to collate information about research and initiatives of relevance to human capability in primary industries.

#### **Interview Process**

One to one interviews, (either face-to-face or via the telephone) were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used to collect the qualitative data. Whilst the quantitative data was obtained via a rating scale of 1-5, where 1 was not at all and 5 major problem.

A sample of industry people considered to be knowledgeable about the deer industry were interviewed including: farmers, processors, consultants, veterinarians, researchers and recruitment agencies.

The interviews took two formats, either a short (15 minutes) or long (45 minutes). The short format interview was used for interviewees who had insufficient time to respond to a long interview but still allowed for the adequate capture of vital information.



### 3 Literature Review

No research was found which directly focused on the workforce side of the Deer Industry. Statistics New Zealand (2002) showed an increase of 34% from 1.2 million deer in 1994 to 1.6 million in 2002. This expansion would indicate an increase in workforce needs.

Gaps exist in understanding how well deer farmers are managing their staffing situations, as well as what the primary training and development needs of deer farmers and farm staff are. An understanding of this would allow customisation and targeting of support by the industry.

The literature outlined below is related to other pastoral agriculture but has some relevance to the Deer Industry.

Nettle, R.A., Petheram, R.J., Paine, M.S. (2000) in-depthly studied employment relationships in the Australian Dairy Industry. Conclusions were that there was the need for employers and employees to discuss the employees' position and opportunities. This study also concluded that there were many variations in where people enter a career, the pathway they take and the wide variation in the stages in that movement. Unlike the assumed linear movement along a clear career path the reality is movement sometimes backwards before being in a situation where there is opportunity to move forward. There is now a need for similar case study work to be undertaken in New Zealand situations.

Forecasting of workforce needs both in number and competency requirements is a complex task. The New Zealand heavy truck industry (Oliver, R., Bass, P., Ludvigson, T., Bolitho, H. 2003) has undertaken a study on this using the number of new heavy trade licences as an indicator of new driver recruitment. Their predicted cumulative shortages were 4000 drivers by the end of 2005 and 10 000 by the end of 2010. This report also interviewed existing drivers to understand the issues and challenges that they faced. The part of this most applicable to deer was the livestock truck drivers, where the key issues were related to the difficulty of handling animals, being responsible for the animals' welfare, substandard farm facilities and being responsible for the paperwork. Stock truck drivers argued that the paperwork should be the stock agents' responsibility. Furthermore, the amount of time away from home meant that many of the stock truck drivers considered it to be a single man's game.

Recent updates on unemployment in New Zealand as at June 2003 (Statistics New Zealand, 2003) revealed the lowest level for more than a decade of 4.7% unemployment as at June 2003. This could be viewed as an indication of the tight labour market. Morriss, S., Tipples, R.S., Townshend, W., MacKay, B., Eastwood. C. (2001)

completed a study to look at skill and labour requirements in the primary sector. They used the Department of Labour's Human Capability Framework which is essentially made up of three interlinking parts to highlight the issues.

Capacity ↔ matching ↔ opportunities

They concluded a focus on building capacity through training and education was critical to providing current and future labour requirements.

Tipples (1999) produced an overview of a century of changes in farm employment. He explains the large increase in farming complexity over that century from 1900.

Tarbotton and Atkins (2003) have undertaken research to explore competency (knowledge and skill) requirements of pastoral farmers. When comparing sheep and beef farmers with deer farmers, deer farmers rated their current "animal general management" and "environmental management" much higher. Their desired level of knowledge was higher indicating a strong appetite to learn more. The numbers of deer farmers in the sample was not high enough to make a strong conclusion, however, the differences shown would justify a fully quantified study on current and future knowledge and skills of deer farmers.

In July 2002 a pan-industry Human Resources in Agriculture workshop was held in Rotorua. Most of the primary industries presented their situation, followed by researchers and then all attendees contributed to defining steps forward. The material from this workshop is available on compact disk, the MAF website or in booklet form. It was from the foundations set at this workshop that the pan-industry Human Capacity in Agriculture Group was formed. This group has drawn up a strategy drawn up and priority areas has been identified.

The Department of Labour produces a publication called "workINSIGHT" every six months. This publication is on skills and work in New Zealand and provides a labour market barometer as well as feature articles. This publication shows that employment growth was 3.5% for the year up to March 2002 but slowed to 1.5% for the year up to March 2003. Figures on employment growth are also given on a regional basis.

There are some very good books (and research) recently completed on knowledge management. The people within an industry or the human capital can be viewed from a knowledge management perspective. Davidson and Voss (2002) provide insights into how knowledge can be shared and new knowledge developed. Workforce management in deer farming revolves around over 3000 farm businesses which must each have adequate knowledge within the people involved to manage livestock and the enterprise.

An important part of knowledge management is to understand the different types of knowledge.

Two of the broad categories are:

- Explicit knowledge: knowledge easy to articulate and share with others.
- Implicit knowledge (or tacit knowledge): knowledge a person knows but does not know how to express or share.

The key implication is that we know more than we can easily share, therefore, and ways to help knowledge transfer are important in adapting to the future. The deer processing companies interviewed shared examples they have used such as mentoring, buddy systems for new staff and knife handling technique demonstrations. How knowledge is managed in deer and pastoral farming is an important topic for future consideration, and will strongly influence future competitiveness.

## 4 Farmer Interviews

### 4.1 Interview Statistics

In total 8 short and 7 long interviews were carried out. For those farmers who provided their farm description information, deer numbers wintered per farm varied from 1350 to 7800 and most farms also carried a number of other species in addition to the deer (see table 1). Staffing, per farm, ranged in number from 3 to 8. Most of the respondents had been in the industry for over 15 years, and had extensive experience in deer farming. Nevertheless, few had tertiary education, and had rather learnt about deer through their own experiences and from other deer farmers.

Farm location	Deer wintered	Other stock	Permanent staff		Casual staff	
			Number	%	Number	%
Waikato	1400	40 cows, 200 sheep	1.5	(43)	2	(57)
Rotorua	1350	600 sheep, 350 steers	1	(34)	2	(66)
Rotorua	1800		1	(34)	2	(66)
Rotorua	3000	500 sheep	2.5	(71)	1	(29)
Canterbury	7800	18000 sheep, 100 bulls	7	(88)	1	(12)
Canterbury	5500	650 cattle	3	(66)	1.5	(34)
Canterbury	7000	1000 sheep, 350 cattle	4	(100)		
Wanaka	3000		2	(66)	1	(34)

**Table 1. Farm statistics (only farms with complete statistics included)**

## 4.2 Background

### The type of labour required on a deer farm

Initially the respondents were asked about the type of labour required by deer farmers and the key requirements they identified were:

- An interest and enthusiasm for deer
- Good stockmanship for which the qualities of a good stockman were identified as being:
  - 1) in the paddock, knowledge of deer grazing management and patience,
  - 2) in the shed, physical strength and a fearless attitude – as deer can sense uncertainty.

The traditional sheep and beef stockman hold certain expectations about how stock should be handled yet they need to put these aside when they move into handling deer, as deer behaviour is very different. For example, many stockmen expect to use dogs when handling stock, but deer intensely dislike and react unpredictably to them. In addition, deer's reactions to handling are very different, as one respondent put it *"they can't be bullied through gates like sheep, if they don't want to go, they won't"*. One farmer reported sending two inexperienced stockmen out to bring in a herd of hinds, two hours later they still hadn't succeeded in shifting them out of the paddock. Every other farmer had similar stories.

However, the general consensus was that a good stockman, who was willing to learn about deer, should eventually be successful at managing them.

### Labour Breakdown

Deer farming, in general, is held to be less labour intensive than other pastoral farm types. There are periods of intense activity, but on the whole, deer are seen to require relatively low labour inputs. Due to the sporadic nature of the work, and the difficulty in obtaining experienced labour, all of the deer farmers interviewed relied to some extent on casual staff to meet work requirements. This trend has strengthened in recent years as the labour shortage has intensified. In addition, contractors were used to carry out a lot of the machinery intensive work e.g. cultivation and harvesting.

Of interest was that a number of the farmers outlined how they were more hands-on with the deer part of their farm and their staff often ran the sheep or beef part with more independence.

### 4.3 The difficulties of recruitment

#### Low numbers of applicants

Fifty percent of the respondents stated that they had difficulties recruiting staff. However, when examined in depth, the problem of availability of staff assumed larger proportions. The farmers that had few problems recruiting staff:

- were in a desirable location e.g. Queenstown or Wanaka
- had a stable staffing situation i.e. had no need to recruit staff
- used family members

Nevertheless, the majority of farmers seem to have difficulties when trying to recruit staff. Many, who previously relied on word of mouth to fill positions, now have to advertise which often gets a very low response. Farmers believed that some of the key reasons why they have difficulties recruiting staff were:

- Few people in the younger age groups (<30) entering the industry. The respondents reported this to be because of the:
  - Remoteness of farms from urban areas. One farmer said the lack of cell phone and poor internet coverage was a deterrent.
  - Perception that farming is not a “cool” career and is just for dummies.
  - Better opportunities and work conditions in other jobs.
  - Farming offspring leaving the farm, becoming tertiary qualified, and entering other careers.
  - Competition from the burgeoning dairy industry In the South Island.
  - Few farmers are willing to train young people. Many have already reduced their staff numbers, both because there are industry staff shortages, and also to increase farm profitability. Thus, they have limited time to train people. Also, they are unwilling to train people because they will be “head hunted” by other farmers as soon as they gain experience. One farmer commented that the attitude and mentoring ability of the first farmer a new person to the industry worked for was crucial in determining whether they continued in the industry.

- Few people in the 30–40 age group are available. These are the staff that would traditionally be entering management roles. The respondents believed that this was because of the:
  - Remoteness of farms from urban areas again being a factor. Many partners of farm staff now have careers outside farming and so need access to an urban centre. In addition, access to schools is limited.
  - Downturn in the sheep and beef sector in the 1980s and the deer sector, after the demise of corporate farms, and in the 1996-97 recession, causing a lot of people to exit the industry, never to return. Many absentee farm owners found they could no longer afford to employ the same staff numbers and came back to work the farm themselves.
- These above factors have resulted in a number of flow-on effects such as:
  - Intense competition for the available skilled staff. Farmers feel that they have to sell themselves and their farm when interviewing potential staff.
  - Recruitment of less experienced, younger people into management positions.
  - An ageing population of experienced managers.
  - An increase in the wages and conditions offered.

Nevertheless, a number of farmers stated that such recruitment problems were not specific to the deer industry, all pastoral industries appear affected in the same way. However, they felt deer industry problems are exacerbated by the specialist skills required by deer farm labour.

One respondent felt that the provision of the following job conditions both attracted staff and helped in their retention:

- Good management - this is not necessarily an attribute of the most technically skilled managers.
- Secure jobs - people are often attracted to the larger farming enterprises, comprising several farms, as they feel their jobs will be more secure. These businesses don't necessarily have to pay the highest wages to attract staff.
- Tidy, safe facilities around the farm.
- Tidy staff houses.
- Professional farm manager, (as opposed to the farm owner), is the boss.
- Provision of further staff training and development opportunities.

### **Changing quality of applicants**

The majority of the farmers interviewed (75%) believed that the quality of job applicants has also changed. The number of people with hands on, practical deer farming experience is decreasing. Stock handling skills are not so prevalent nowadays.

Most farmers stated a preference to employ staff with practical deer experience and that formal education was of lesser importance to them. Although, one farmer commented that quality is becoming an issue, as a progressively higher skill set is required as the job becomes more technical. Either way, the bulk of people applying for deer farm jobs have neither practical deer experience nor a formal education. This has resulted in fierce competition for experienced staff, higher wages and the employment of less experienced staff.

Often farmers attempting to employ skilled staff have ended up with unfilled positions and having to re-advertise. Some farmers stated that when interviewing staff they felt that they had to sell themselves to the applicant to attract them to accept the job they were offering. This is a contrast to in the past where farmers could be more selective.

Three educational institutions were identified as offering training with a dedicated deer component:

- Telford Rural Polytechnic and Agriculture ITO. Telford offers a deer module as part of its Certificate in Agriculture, and
- Agriculture ITO offers a National Certificate in Agriculture (deer). One farmer stated his preference to employ graduates from Telford as junior employees.
- Aoraki Polytech also has some deer courses.

### **4.4 Managing the seasonal workload**

Deer farming is characterised by intense bursts of high activity interspersed with work loads at a much lower level. This can be difficult to manage with a compliment of full time, permanent staff only. Casual staff are drawn from a pool of:

- retired deer farmers
- next door neighbours
- staff from other enterprises on the farm i.e. sheep and beef
- students
- offspring
- itinerant labourers



In addition, contractors are used to fill the gap (and to reduce machinery costs). On a lot of farms where silage making occurs at the same time as velvetting, contractors are used to ease this workload congestion.

On smaller deer (or mixed farming) enterprises there was often just the owner/operator who would use experienced casual staff at the busy times of year where deer handling is required.

#### **4.5 Human resource management**

The majority of the interviewed farmers had instigated few formal human resource management practices. Employment contracts were only used for permanent staff – one farmer commented that the contracts he had with staff were nothing like the formalised dairy farm style contracts; performance assessment was rare and further training was not promoted. Reasons behind this could be explained from one farmers comment *“Why encourage them to do training? When they get it, they will just be head hunted”*.

##### **Staff Assessment**

Some of the respondents carried out formal performance assessment in the form of an annual performance review. One farmer had just introduced performance assessment as a means of retaining staff, through regular pay reviews. One farmer carried out a review six months after staff started, and then only met when pay rates needed to be reviewed.

The majority of farmers interviewed carried out no formal reviews and considered the monitoring of daily performance to be more than adequate.

##### **Training**

Only three of the farmers interviewed recruited any staff with formal, tertiary training. The majority just looked for practical experience with deer, and in some cases, just general farming experience, as people with deer experience were difficult to obtain. The lack of job applicants has resulted in a lowering of expectations when employing staff. In any case, deer experience was rated more highly than formal training by respondents. The majority of the respondents had no formal training themselves and this may have influenced their opinions about the value of training.

Encouragement to attend training, once employed, was minimal. Only one large farming conglomerate actively encouraged staff to pursue further training. The training offered to their staff was wide ranging and included structured on-farm learning opportunities along with active encouragement to attend off-farm training programs. Within the business, staffs were offered training in team building and management skills, in addition, experienced staff were used to help train staff on newly established deer units. Off farm,

staff attended Agriculture ITO courses, courses in feed budgeting and farm safety, and deer workshops at AgResearch Invermay. However, it was noted that there was a lack of deer components in most other agricultural courses.

The rest offered limited opportunities in areas such as velvetting and farm safety. On the whole, it was left to staff to put themselves forward for training. For most farmers, training was seen as extraneous to the core farming business, and in some cases, even risky, as staff would increase their skills and shift on to other jobs. It was not seen as a method of retaining staff, and only one farmer mentioned the positive effects of training.

When asked for possible topics for training to address, the following were suggested:

- Modification of existing programs to include a deer component.
- Deer management, focussing on: feed and pasture management, animal health and deer handling. As younger people are recruited into management they need training in the “hard core” management skills.
- Use of computers.
- A course or information pack for farmers new to the deer industry.

One farmer suggested that training should come in the form of training days, perhaps 1.5 days long, that they should be focussed and to the point, and that reading material could be sent out prior to the day. This farmer felt that courses like the one offered by Telford were too long. Several farmers also mentioned that they could already access training in velvetting, farm safety and first aid from alternative sources.

### **Keeping staff “in the loop”**

There was a mixed response to the question whether staff were kept informed about the farm’s production performance. Some farmers actively involved staff members by holding regular meetings, or, where there were a number of farms owned by one business, holding internal discussion groups. Others left it up to staff to discover how the farm was performing for themselves. In some cases, the willingness to share information with staff was affected by the fear of criticism.

One farming business compiled a business plan for each farm, outlining the activities to be carried out, this was displayed so that all of the staff had access. In addition, monthly performance records were available for staff.

## 4.6 Deer industry involvement

### Support for farmers

Farmers were asked if there was anything the deer industry could do to support their enterprise. The main concern that they felt needed to be addressed at both the industry and farm level was the lack of people entering the industry.

Their individual opinions were that:

- There is a perception that farming is a career for dummies and it is not seen as a serious career option. The ability to pursue farming as a profitable career, with good opportunities for advancement needs to be promoted.
- Farming should be actively promoted to schools and at career expos. It could be promoted not only as a long term career option, but also as a good experience to undertake between school and starting a career.
- Farming staff are generally not paid well enough, in comparison with other careers, and this needs to change.
- The industry has been slow to react to a labour shortage problem which has been building over the last fifteen years.
- The example of a group of dairy farmers could be followed. These farmers have joined together to fund the training of two new people a year, to share amongst the farms.
- As the deer sector is not a large part of the pastoral industry, it is difficult to run dedicated courses. Maybe deer focussed courses need industry support.
- Twenty scholarships could be provided to encourage young people into the industry. They could be put through a three year course, with a component of practical work on various farms combined with school work. This would lessen the effects of a single farmer with poor mentoring skills, as the cadets would be exposed to a number of different farmers. One of the farmers used to offer a one year cadetship, but found the applications for this ceased, maybe promotion at an industry level would encourage young people to take up these opportunities.

Overall, there was a perception that farmers were themselves the main cause of labour problems and needed to improve both working conditions and pay to attract and retain staff.

### **The provision of information**

Farmers were asked if it would be useful for the industry to provide staff with deer industry information and newsletters. On the whole, they felt that there was already plenty of information available. One farmer felt that it was more important to put the information they already have into practice on the farm. Another felt that most staff were not interested in reading information anyway. That they were more interested in pursuing recreational activities in their spare time, rather than sitting down to read about deer. He also felt that a lot of the research carried out, and information they received, was “yesterday’s news”.

An information pack was suggested for those people just starting out in deer farming. The reason being is that there are so many differences in how you work with deer, and the facilities that they require from other livestock farming.

## 5 Non farmer interviews (consultants, researchers and vets)

### 5.1 Interview statistic

A range of non farmers (see Table 2) all of whom were associated with the deer industry and worked in a role where they could have an opinion on the workforce questions, were interviewed to gain their perspective.

Role of person interviewed	Location
Farm Consultant	Hawkes Bay
Farm Consultant	Wairarapa
Researcher	Manawatu
Researcher	Otago
Researcher	Otago
Vet	South Canterbury
Vet	Hawkes Bay

**Table 2. Non-Farmers interviewed**

### 5.2 Consultants

Two consultancy businesses were interviewed. Neither business provided consultancy for farms that were strictly deer, however, one of the consultants had a significant number of farms containing deer enterprises (30%). The other ran a recruitment agency for farm staff.

When asked if a different type of staff were needed on deer farms, one consultant believed that it depended on the type of staff wanted: deer farm managers needed experience with deer, but general stockmen just needed to be good at their job, keen and able to learn. He thought that people either didn't like deer, because of the dust, stink and risk of injury in the shed, or loved them and wouldn't work with any other kinds of stock. The other believed that farmers didn't request staff with deer experience because they didn't want to restrict job applications.

The respondents were asked if it had become more difficult to recruit staff for deer farms. They believed that it was difficult and this was due to the general lack in farm staff. Responses to advertisements put out by the recruiting agency had gone from 12-20 per advertisement to none. It was considered that the problem was worse at the lower end of the scale, no young people were applying for jobs, however, there were a few more people available for managerial positions.

The consultants had differing opinions about the quality of staff available, but both thought the quality had not changed. One thought that it *“had always been difficult to get trained staff”*, the other, *“that good quality applicants were still available”*.

Both consultancy agencies provided recruitment and training for farmers, in addition to farm consulting. The training focussed on farm management and feed budgeting.

One consultant believed that the whole profile of agriculture needed to be lifted to encourage people back into the industry. There needs to be promotion in schools to inform people that there is a chance to get into a good paying career in agriculture, with the chance to move into management.

### **5.3 Researchers**

Three researchers were interviewed all of which undertook research applicable to the deer industry, with one based in the North Island and two in the South Island. Generally they did not feel they were the most suitable people to comment. However when questioned further they were broadly aware of the situation and gave examples they were aware of, where farmers they had contact with, had difficulty getting suitably experienced staff. One quoted a recent forum of Central North Island Maori Deer Farming Incorporations where the number one need they identified was again the reoccurring issue of *“getting adequately trained staff”*.

Researchers were very aware of the decrease in numbers of tertiary students studying agriculture and hence a low number of graduates wanting to go farming. They also outlined the lack of a deer component in many of the existing agricultural tertiary courses.

The researchers felt that the deer farm staff situation was likely to be closely aligned to the situation on sheep and beef farms but thought there needed to be some sort of accurate measure or monitoring undertaken to understand the situation. Of particular note was that none of the researchers interviewed knew of any research going on or completed applicable to human resources in the Deer Industry.

## 5.4 Vets

Two vets were interviewed one from the South Island and one from the North Island. One vet dedicated 100% and the other 25% of their time to the deer industry. They both considered the workforce supply and experience was a minor problem at present. They felt there were less people applying for deer farm jobs but it was still possible to get people. Experienced deer farm employees/managers were considered very scarce and tended to come from other farms sectors.

Both vets mentioned the important roles casual staff and between farm work exchanges play in enabling experienced people to complete deer handling work.

As far as vets (to service deer farms) they felt that vets either love deer or hate them. The exception to this being “*a colleague who is allergic*” which one of the vets had and which he said was reasonably common.

The vets outlined that they considered there was a general shortage of vets with overseas vets mainly from Europe helping to reduce the shortfall.

One of the vets felt that there would be value in deer farmers visiting other deer farms especially to look at facilities. Having clear information about facilities required for deer is important information for those starting out in deer farming.

KiwiCareers Veterinarian Regional Market Details (2002) outlines that there is a shortage of vets in rural practices. This report breaks down this into regional categories and the difference in vet supply in urban verses rural centres.

## 6 Processor Interviews

### 6.1 Interview Statistics

In total 5 processors were interviewed, 3 in the South Island and 2 in the North Island. The largest one was unwilling to give staff numbers for the deer part of their operation. For the other four processing companies the staff numbers ranged from 21 to 43. The interviewees came from a mixture of specialist venison processing businesses and venison plants which were a part of a larger multi-species processing business.

### 6.2 Background

Given venison's value added product requirements, respondents were asked if the type of staff required for deer processing was different.

It was thought that skilled staff were required to produce high quality venison products, and close attention needed to be paid to quality control. A higher proportion of boners/trimmers were required. One processor stated that it was important to get presentation and packaging right as their product went straight from the processor into a retail situation, therefore, as one respondent said *"staff need to get it right on the floor"*.

The small size of independent deer processing units in comparison to those for other species was thought to be a disadvantage. One respondent felt that it was difficult to develop and test new products, there weren't sufficient resources in-house and outsourcing was too expensive.

Processor Total staff	Yards	Slaughter	Boning	Packing/ Labelling	Chiller/ Freezer	Casuals	Other
21	1.5	7	8	3	0.5		1
36.5	3	7	10	5	3	3-6	4
43	3	18	6	13	2		1
27.5	2	9	11	4	1.5		
<b>Average</b>	2.4	10.3	8.8	6.3	1.8	1	1.5
<b>Percentage of work force</b>	7.5	32.1	27.4	19.6	5.6	3	4.7

(One processor did not provide this information).

**Table 3. Labour breakdown in venison processing**



### **6.3 Recruiting Staff**

Generally it was felt that recruiting staff was becoming more difficult, although it wasn't a problem as yet. Four out of five of the interviewees saw it as a worsening situation. The need for skilled knife hands to produce specialist deer products made it more problematic.

The location and size of the plant also had an effect. Those in the remoter rural regions: the bottom of the South Island, or away from the larger urban areas, had more difficulties. Smaller plants also had more difficulties. It was noted that there was competition between processors for staff. In addition there were yet again fewer young people entering the industry.

#### **Staff Quality**

The interviewees felt that there was a trend towards lower skill levels in recruits. Although this was not considered to be a problem as yet, they could see it might well be a problem in the future. In addition, the skill set required is increasing due to the increasing sophistication of the finished product. For new recruits, either experienced staff were employed, or on site training was used to provide the upskilling required. One processor believed paying their staff a salary, in contrast to an hourly rate, was a good method of retaining staff.

### **6.4 Managing the seasonal workload**

When asked how they managed the seasonal workload there was a variety of responses. Some of the processors had year round killing, so there was no seasonal requirement. Other larger companies were able to shift staff from one plant to another to fill any gaps. One company used casual staff during the busy season, they found that staff returned year after year, so finding casual staff was not too much of a problem.

### **6.5 Human resource management**

#### **Staff Assessment**

Formal assessment of staff was not the norm. One processor carried out regular staff assessments with performance scored on a range of 1 to 4 for a variety of tasks. Bonuses were dependent on good performance. Another stated that staff were paid as a group on a "*per head down the chain*" basis.

## **Training**

On recruitment the level of training was dependent on the degree of previous experience. Most processors carried out an induction process followed by using a “buddy” system to get the new staff member up to speed.

One processor noted that if a staff member had the opportunity of changing jobs, then they would have a training plan constructed to give them guidance on the skills required for the new position.

On going training in food safety was available through some of the processors.

One processor stated that they were moving towards a NZQA framework with in-house trainers and assessors. The two key reasons for this shift were: that staff appreciated it; and those inspecting the company are now starting to require it e.g. nationally: MAF, internationally: EU/USFDA and key supermarket clients.

In addition the processors would like to see training available in these areas:

- Customer needs and consistency of specifications, so workers are less isolated from the marketplace.
- More food safety courses
- Venison boning
- Bacto and food handling

## **Keeping staff “in the loop”**

All of the processors held staff meetings on a weekly or monthly basis to provide staff with information on how the company was faring. One stated that bacto and wash down results were regularly posted on the staff notice board. One had a weekly review where the company yield and financial results were displayed.

## **6.6 Deer industry involvement**

One processor felt that the industry could help in the following areas:

- The provision of polytechnic training e.g. in meat skills.
- Through access to R&D and new product development.
- Through risk assessments of the plant in relation to the shelf life of products.

Another felt that a ‘meat school’ to train staff to a suitable, set standard before being recruited would be useful, and that school career advisors needed to promote opportunities in the meat industry.

### **Provision of information**

The respondents were asked if it would be useful for the industry to provide their staff with deer industry information and newsletters. Most of the processors felt that the provision of extra information would be useful, although one commented that *“the low level of literacy amongst staff may restrict the usefulness of written material”*. On the other hand several also noted that independent information would be useful as it would be apolitical. Furthermore, one also stated that information posted on the web would be of use.

## 7 Recommendations

From the findings and discussions in this report a number of recommendations can be made which are to:

- Commission a study to gain an accurate description of the New Zealand Deer Industry which includes the people involved, mix of enterprises, scale and future plans.
- Appoint one person as the Deer Industry “point of contact” for human capability/ workforce.
- Promote the Deer Industry as a worthwhile career path for potential new recruits and develop support materials to be able to do this.
- Continue to actively participate in the pan-industry Human Capability in Agriculture initiative both at the Governance Group and Working Group levels.
- Advocate for the Deer Industry to be included as a category in research or surveys being undertaken, such as those by Statistics NZ or AgITO.
- Start to include a “workforce” column in the main deer farming press to raise farmer awareness of their legal requirements, better employer/employee relationships and training opportunities.

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## Appendix 1 : Farmer Interview

### Deer Workforce Supply Review

#### Farmer Questions – Long Questionnaire

##### Context

Is there a difference in the type of staff needed on a Deer farm compared with other pastoral farms? Y / N

If Yes, what is the difference?

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##### Quantity of people

*(answer these three questions in the table below)*

What are the types of people you need on your farm?

How many in each of these roles?

For your property has there been an increase or decrease in this? (in the 5 years)

Key roles – “possible roles in brackets”	No. in this role	Incr/Decr/Static
(Permanent – mgmt level)		
(Permanent – experienced)		
(Permanent – limited experience)		
(Part time or Casuals)		
(Contractor)		
Other _____		

What are the key reasons you have this combination?

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Have you found it more difficult to recruit people for these types of positions in the last 3 years? ( Y / N )

If Yes, in what ways?

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**Quality of people**

Has the quality (training, skills and experience) of people you have recruited (or contracted) changed over time? ( Y / N )

If Yes, how?

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In relation to labour requirements and staff, how do you manage the seasonal nature of the workload on your farm?

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What assessment do you do of individual staff?

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## Training

What training do staff generally have when they are recruited?

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What training do you encourage staff to undertake? How?

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What are the areas of up-skilling you would like to have available to staff in the future?

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Are staff given feedback about farm production performance?

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What could the Deer industry do to support your enterprise?

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Would there be benefit in the industry providing your staff with deer industry information and newsletters?

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**Summary**

Rate each of the following on the 1-5 scale	Not at all					Major
Recruiting of staff is a problem (Quantity)	1	2	3	4	5	
Decrease in ability/experience of staff is becoming a problem (Quality)	1	2	3	4	5	

Do you have any more ideas on these ratings?

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**Any other comments:**

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What are the range of stock or enterprises you have on your farm?

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How many deer did you winter in 2002?

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What has your path into deer farming been? (re: steps, experience gained, training etc)

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Which of the following best describes your deer farming operation? (circle one or more)

Breeding, Breeding and Finishing, Finishing only, Velveting

Comments about your deer operations: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix 2 : Processor Interview

### Deer Workforce Supply Review

#### Processor Questionnaire

##### Context

How does the focus on value added products from deer influence the type of staff you need compared with other processors (or parts of processing companies)?

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##### Quantity of people

*(answer these three questions in the table below)*

What are the types of people you need in your venison processing?

What numbers are needed in each of these roles?

Is there an increase or decrease in this?

Key roles – “possible roles in brackets”	No. in this role	Incr/Decr/Static
(Yards)		
(Slaughter)		
(Boning)		
(Packing/Labelling)		
(Chiller/Freezer)		
Other _____		
Other _____		
(Casuals)		

Have you found it more difficult to recruit people for these types of positions in the last 3 years? ( Y / N )

If Yes, in what ways?

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**Quality of people**

Has the quality (training, skills and experience) of people you have recruited changed over time? ( Y / N )

If Yes, how?

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For staff, how do you handle the seasonal nature of the work?

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What assessment do you have of individual staff?

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**Training**

What training do staff generally have when they are recruited?

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What training do you provide to staff currently?

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What are the areas of training you would like to have available to staff in the future?

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Are staff given feedback about processing plant performance?

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Is there anything the industry could do to support your enterprise?

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Would there be benefit in the industry providing your companies' staff with deer industry information and newsletters?

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**Summary**

Rate each of the following on the 1-5 scale	Not at all					Major
Recruiting of staff is a problem (Quantity)	1	2	3	4	5	
Decrease in ability/experience of staff is becoming a problem (Quality)	1	2	3	4	5	

Do you have any more ideas on these ratings?

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**Any other comments:**

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## **Appendix 3 : List of Interviewees/Organisations**

### **Farmers:**

Donald Whyte

Mandy Bell

Pauline Meade

Graeme Mulligan

Mark Acland,

David Acland

Bob Foster

Bill Robinson

Trevor Smythe

John Closey

Plus ~6 others attending the Deer Conference in Timaru

### **Venison Processing Companies:**

Richmond

PPCS

Mountain River

Otago Venison

Auckland Meat Processors

### **Researchers:**

David Stevens

Peter Wilson

Ian Scott

### **Vets:**

Noel Beatson

Richard Hilton

**Consultants:**

Roy Fraser, Agriculture NZ

Catriona Bayliss, Baker and Associates