

## THE RECENT STATUS OF DEER FARMING IN NEW ZEALAND

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In 20 years, the New Zealand deer farming industry has grown dramatically to involve 1.2 million deer and annual export receipts exceeding (NZ) \$169 million, a six-fold increase in four years. Venison and velvet antler are the major products. The industry's future will be determined by a total commitment to continual improvement of product quality and marketing via an industry strategic plan.

Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) make up 90% of the farmed animals and form the basis for widespread breeding and selection programmes involving imported strains of red deer from throughout Europe. Hinds are also used successfully in hybridization programmes with the North American wapiti (*Cervus elaphus canadensis*) to increase body weight for age, or growth rate, and to make rapid gains in the velvet antler production.

Red deer are being used to produce a unique hybrid with Pere David deer (*Elaphurus davidianus*)(MHu). Reproductive technologies, including artificial insemination, embryo transfer and, potentially, in-vitro fertilisation are widely used throughout the industry to enhance basic genetics and breeding. The New Zealand deer research programme aims to provide an extensive study of the biology of farmed deer which is fundamental to improving the export deer industry and the quality and variety of deer products.

Major studies involve the interaction of the seasonality of these temperate deer with reproductive, antler and body growth physiology, and matching these seasonal aspects to the particular pasture production and farm management systems on New Zealand farms.

Animal health issues include welfare, tuberculosis control, versinosis, parasites and the interaction of stress and disease.

The industry is focusing on the establishment of codes of practice and quality assurance programmes that cover all aspects of the industry in partnership from farm to consumer.