Deer (Cervidae) Version 1.4 21 March 2015

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Introduction

The farming of deer originated in New Zealand, which remains the world's largest and most advanced in this form of farming. There are 4,000 deer farms ranging in size from hobby farms to large commercial ones grazing nearly 2 million head, which is half the world's farmed deer population. See The Deer Farmers' Information Network at www.deerfarmer.com for more information.

There is not much about deer in this eBook for two reasons, one, I have not farmed them and two, it would take a 200 page book to cover the topic. Fortunately books about deer have been written. See Free Items > Further Reading and for deer fencing information see Fencing.

Cervina is the New Zealand name for venison to differentiate it from other deer meat. It, like venison, is a popular, firm (not tender) tasty, high iron, low fat, low cholesterol meat.

In 2005 more than 1.7 million deer were being farmed in New Zealand, the most by far in any country.

Deer are accustomed to taking refuge from the weather in bush (forests) in summer heat, and in winter cold, so providing it is advisable as shown here where Poplar trees and barberry hedges are provided on the Waikato dairy farm of Gordon Finlay, share-milked by son Derek.

Trees should be deciduous like these in summer, and below in winter, to let the sun through.

In winter, shade in New Zealand is not normally needed, so unless needed for cold wind protection, Spacing them as above causes the shade to move, so animals get up and graze again and don't damage the pasture in one place.

Trees lift the summer hot winds, reducing drying out of pastures and they create cool drafts under them, which animals like.

All the trees in these three photos are deciduous Italian poplars that provide edible leaves and branches. Some trunks can be sold for timber. Replacements can be planted in the gaps years before harvesting.

NZ indigenous trees are not as suitable because they are shallow rooting, evergreen and slower growing than poplars. Poplar trees drop their leaves which contain minerals. Eating them makes browsing animals (deer and goats) and earthworms healthier.

In summer droughts, branches can be cut and fed as shown here on the right in the previous year.

Ruminant stomach micro fauna and flora are sensitive to change so change all feeds gradually over days.

Trials in Italy in the 1950s found that Poplars along waterways absorbed nitrogen from soils so reduced the underground nitrogen moving to lakes and aquifers.

Pampas grass is another possibility, but plant only one sex so that it doesn't multiply and spread. Check that there are no opposite sex Pampas plants in the area which could produce fertile seeds and cause spreading as a weed, especially in forests.

The forage Tree-Lucerne fixes N, is drought resistant, but lasts only about eight years.

Like goats, deer prefer pastures with some weeds, shrubs and trees growing in them to supply the browse they love and the minerals they need. Analysing pasture tissue for deficiencies and fertilising with minerals can help provide a better pasture. Our son-in-law noticed that his milking goats ate more, and more enthusiastically for a few months, after applying correct fertilisers. He was in a high rainfall light ash soil that leaches. Deer could be the same. The aim of all graziers should be to get the animals to eat as much as possible and produce as much as possible and grow as fast as possible. Balancing mineral levels in pastures helps, in fact, could be essential.

Deer can be rotationally grazed. They should be spread out when fawning and when puggy soils are wet, then grouped up in spring to rotate them and to harvest surpluses.

Handling facilities for deer must be specially made with darkened and padded crush bales which have the floor drop away leaving the deer suspended on the tapered sides. They then usually hang calmly.

Revolving sale pens make operating auctions easy. Designs are available from some New Zealand deer farmers or stock agents.

Deer have the same natures as cattle, but need **more** taming by quietly moving through them and feeding them titbits such as grain. Teach them to come by calling rather than with dogs and people chasing them.

Deer have been shot at and captured by humans for centuries so are naturally nervous of us.

Elk have been crossed with Red deer to give larger carcasses.

Lincoln University, Christchurch, NZ, found that deer can be milked and produce up to 900 ml/day. During the research they found that the growth of fawns was not related to the amount of milk that does produced, but to its growth genes.

Copper

Deer are very susceptible to low copper (Cu), so ensure that pasture tissue levels are 0.13 ppm or higher and that molybdenum, sulphur, iron and manganese (in the drinking water) are not too high. If molybdenum, sulphur, iron and/or manganese in the drinking water can't be corrected, supplement with more Cu. See Elements > Copper.

Deer are also badly affected by endophyte staggers such as from AR37. Selenium in the drinking water reduces the staggers in cattle so may help deer. Please let me know if you have success with it.

Copper deficiencies in deer can cause arthritis, steely coats, reduced fertility, slightly reduced velvet production. The deer foetus is like those in cattle in that it can remove Cu from it's mother for it's own benefit, to survive until grazing pasture because milk has almost no Cu.

Consequently deer fawns and calves are born with optimum levels of Cu in their livers.

Lambs, don't do this, and if their mothers have low Cu levels, they will be born with low Cu levels and on steep hills can break legs in their first week. See Elements > Copper.

Low Cu can cause arthritis in their hip and hock joints.

Coats can be steely particularly in winter when feed is short and stock are grazing short pasture and/or fed off the ground, both of which lead to excessive iron intake from the soil.

Their coats become harsh and parts break off leaving bald areas.

Hinds that get a Cu supplement cycle better than those that don't.

Some reports in New Zealand claim an improvement in velvet production after supplementing with Cu.

More information that applies to most animals is in GrazingInfo and www.deerfarmer.com

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