

Report to ADMG AGM – Scottish Venison

Dick Playfair, Secretary, Scottish Venison Partnership

A full report on activity on the wild venison front is given on page 10 of the latest edition of Scope. Here are some notable points:

2018 was a challenging and busy year. The Scottish Venison Partnership has been working closely with other aspects of the venison sector on a new strategy for Scottish venison at the behest of Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing. This is now complete, under the title Beyond the Glen this looks ahead to securing and growing the market for venison, both wild and farmed, in the UK to 2030, dovetailing with Scotland Food and Drink's overall strategy for our food and drink industry.

Details of the content of the venison strategy are given in Scope or the document in its entirety is available online with links on the Scottish Venison and Scottish Government websites or just google Beyond the Glen.

The wild sector was also challenged by Food Standards Scotland early last year warning that it viewed the venison process and the supply of wild product into the food chain as high risk. To meet those concerns SVP undertook a number of initiatives through 2018 including the production of three food safety films for producers (upland and lowland) under the Best Practice banner, an advertising campaign in specialist press, editorial, making available a presentation on Understanding Contamination and other actions. Hopefully this has allayed FSS concerns although there is no doubt that the sector remains under scrutiny with both increased engagement by FSS at processor level, and by local authorities regarding deer larder inspections and enforcement.

One safeguard for everyone lies in the Quality Assurance scheme, SQWV, as its inspection protocol will ensure that your process is up to the appropriate standard. There is intention this year to extend the scheme to encompass producers of small quantities. As part of the continuing health awareness programme a short meat hygiene refresher course will also be rolled out for the wild deer sector.

The PGI process continues. The application, which was subject of a UK consultation last year, is now going to Europe with very slight revisions to the original specification. We have been advised that whatever the UK status after Brexit there is still relevance as we will either stay as part of the European scheme (non-EU products can have PGI status within the EU scheme) or equivalent status can be achieved through a new UK protected foods scheme. SVP has been a consultee in this process.

Given the record cull in 2017/18 (again see the report in Scope) it is likely that volumes will be down in 2018/19. This presents further opportunity for imported product but, given the shortage of supply coming from New Zealand at present, although NZ exports were up by around 200 tonnes in 2018 against the previous year) this may see further slow-down in market growth.

As part of the new venison strategy, and following an internal review, the Scottish Venison Partnership is restructuring and will become the Scottish Venison Association subject to ratification at its AGM in April. This will re-balance the organisation to ensure that it is producer and processor led with a six strong industry leadership group, a six strong committee plus chair, secretariat and advisers, which

will take on the role of the Scottish Venison Hub as identified in the strategy, and a slightly revised constitution. Core funding will continue to come via the levy which I hope that those of you who do will continue to support and those of you who don't will sign up to as and when it is extended.

Finally, SVP is a partner in the Wild Deer Health Project, a study being undertaken by the Moredun Research Institute and Edinburgh University. This was set up to better understand the prevalence of harmful E Coli O157 in wild deer. The first phase of that study is now complete and has been reported and many of you took the trouble to collect and submit samples for it. This showed that this harmful strain of E Coli is there in our wild deer herd but at very low prevalence (less than 0.3 per cent). We also know from the three positive samples received however that it is random and sporadic and therefore could appear anywhere at any time. The message therefore remains to be extra vigilant, to follow Best Practice regarding meat hygiene at all times and to do everything you can to minimise the risk of this bug getting into the food chain. Part 2 of the study which analyses risk areas in the primary process from hill to processor will be reported on in early summer once the work has been completed. Again, more detail of the study is written up in Scope.

Thank you.