

Scottish Venison Partnership – Report on the Year 2012 – 13

Dick Playfair, Secretary, Scottish Venison Partnership

The Scottish Venison Partnership (SVP) is the pan-industry body representing producers of venison, wild and farmed, and includes ADMG, the British Deer Farms and Parks Association, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry Commission Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association, the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Quality Wild Venison. SVP has continued to be busy with the major issue of how to increase Scottish venison production to meet growing market demand.

In broad terms, the wild red cull is static or declining, the UK market for venison is reported as growing at 25 per cent plus per annum, and the main game dealers have reported an increasing shortfall with their imports in excess of 25,000 carcasses equivalent in 2012 from New Zealand and Poland. Imported Spanish venison is now also coming into the UK market.

The plan, endorsed by the Scottish Venison Strategy Group (and Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary in his press statement of May 2012) remains to increase venison production in Scotland by 1200 tonnes (or one third) by 2020. Scotland currently produces around 3500 tonnes of venison. By comparison, New Zealand produced 22,900 tonnes in 2011/12 (both wild and farmed).

SVP is involved in a number of initiatives either individually or with the Scottish Venison Strategy Group:

More and better information

It had been identified that more accurate market information is required at all levels. This is now being achieved in part through Scotland Food and Drink Insights. In addition, an Interface funded project with Napier University Business School should determine more accurately quantities of venison being produced in Scotland, the rest of the UK, New Zealand, Poland and Spain; quantities of venison imports into the UK; and a system for ongoing annual reporting of this.

SVP has asked for regular monitoring and reporting through Scotland Food and Drink Insights of market trends across retail, catering and food service where such figures are available.

Supply chain

SVP is active in promoting opportunities to 'join up' local producers and local markets, particularly specialist butchers and individual estates.

How are we doing this? With the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) and the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS), SVP held two evenings for butchers in September 2012 at The Lodge, Carfraemill and Aberdeen Airport Thistle Hotel.

SVP also attended the one-day Perth Butchers Fair in May this year with a stand, where there was also a butchery demonstration by Iain Hunter

(Hunters of Kinross) and Nichola Fletcher. At that event Hunters also won a top Diamond Award for their Scottish Wild Venison Stir Fry.

Feedback generally is that local independent butchers would sell more venison if they knew where to source it; and also would be prepared to work more with roe and sika.

There are two more butchers events planned in September in Scotland's central belt.

In addition, the Scottish Venison leaflet for butchers and their customers has been updated and reprinted, this work funded by SNH.

Scottish Venison Day

4th September is Scottish Venison Day, and an event for cookery media was staged at the Edinburgh New Town Cookery School on 4th September 2012. The 2013 Scottish Venison Day event will be held on 4 September in Fife in conjunction with Scottish Land & Estates and the British Deer Farms and Parks Association (BDFPA). Both Richard Lochhead MSP, Cabinet Secretary, and Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Environment, have been invited to attend.

Deer Parks/Farming

An application has been developed for £96,500 funding under the Skills Development Scheme for a two year deer farm demonstration project. This is an estimated £130,000 project in total, the balance being made up by contributions in kind from Scotland Food and Drink, NFUS, SFQC, the Venison Advisory Service and SVP.

The project's aim is to reach 200 potential new deer farm/park businesses in two years and provide them with the basic tools to diversify, including a manual, supporting information on DVD/YouTube, showcasing of venison products, routes to market etc.

There is also a second Interface-funded research project being set up with Aberdeen University/The Hutton Institute to determine barriers preventing diversification into deer farming/parks in Scotland.

Promotion

Promotion has been ongoing through the year, as well as updating and maintaining of website www.scottish-venison.info which I would encourage you to look at, and joint promotional effort with SQWV (SVP and SQWV have very close links and are working together with SQWV on a number of projects). The website is also home to the Deer in Scotland Education Zone, an initiative funded by SNH, and probably the most comprehensive on-line education resource for a land mammal, certainly in the UK.

Funding

SVP funding is as always delicate. SVP's total budget (excluding any activity undertaken and/or paid for by SNH and which is crucial to SVP continuing going forward), is around £24,000 of which just under half comes from the 1p/kilo levy. There are now 3 game dealers (Ardgay Game, Highland Game and Yorkshire Game), all of whom are SQWV accredited, collecting the levy from this year. Core funding remains secure from Forest Enterprise for a further two years for which SVP is extremely grateful, and a small surplus has

been carried forward from the previous year. The levy is now an essential plank of SVP funding, with additional support pledged by Highland Game at SVP's most recent meeting in early June, to keep the Group on a stable footing.

Other activity during 2012/13

- Ongoing attendance at the Deer Management Round Table.
- Input into both the Welfare of Animals at Time of Killing (WATOK) discussions, and the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) ongoing dialogue on live capture (undertaken by John Fletcher).
- Input into the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Food Charter.
- Discussions with Government on payments to new entrants and those previously excluded from SFP to include deer farmers (undertaken by John Fletcher).
- Initiation of discussions with Forest Enterprise regarding opportunities for development of venison production on the National Forest Estate.
- Response to EU proposal on trade in unskinned large wild game.

In conclusion, I think we should all be excited about venison, and about wild deer as a source of food, especially given there is a healthy demand for it. That works in terms of what we do. The fact that we eat what we manage adds considerable weight to any argument about sustainability.

Thank you.