

Scottish Venison Partnership report

A few words about what has been happening in the wild venison sector.

Firstly, the application for PGI, protected geographical indicator, for Scottish Wild Venison is now out for consultation, being promoted by both the Scottish Government and by Defra. This is something SVP has been working for the last five years plus and we have eventually got that application into the system. It is important in that it will help to reinforce the story and the provenance behind Scottish Wild Venison and set it aside from farmed venison and imported wild and farmed. It is not a quality mark but denotes provenance and the SVP view is that we have an important story to tell so we are doing that. The consultation is running until the end of May at which time responses will be assessed and we may be asked to amend the spec. Then it goes for consultation in Europe, and ultimately for final signing off in Brussels.

Secondly, SVP has been working hard behind the scenes to create an opportunity for the whole Scottish venison sector to meet with Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity to discuss with him how we can better promote, develop and support this tremendous asset. The meeting which took place earlier this month covered both wild and farmed venison, recognising that wild forms far and away the bulk of what is produced and the importance in safeguarding this – hence PGI also. The outcome of the meeting is for a smaller group to develop a sector plan for Scottish Venison to fit with the Scotland Food and Drink strategy Ambition 2030.

As you know SVP has been developing with SQWV and SNH three films that highlight potential risk areas for contamination in the venison food chain from hill to plate and how these can be minimised on the hill and in the larder. These films are now available. I would encourage you strongly to watch them, particularly in the light of what I am about to tell you regarding meetings with Food Standards Scotland. The films are on Youtube, a link is on the ADMG website and will be circulated over the next few months in E-Scope and I am pleased to see that BDS has also been promoting them in its Deerbytes E Newsletter.

Most importantly, the venison sector was called to a meeting with Food Standards Scotland at the end of February. FSS has been running a programme of unannounced inspections at processor premises over the past few months and has come up with a list of what it terms 'systemic non-compliance'. Basically the sector has been told by FSS to sort itself out or we can expect to see action being taken by FSS to do what it sees fit to stem these breaches of food safety regulation and put the sector either on a safer footing or start shutting businesses down as it has the powers to do.

FSS is currently working with ADMG, SQWV, SVP and others to develop an action plan and we are keen to impress that we can only do what is within the bounds of the possible and by persuasion and encouragement. None of our organisations has any powers of compulsion although FSS and the local authorities do. This is a huge opportunity in our view for SQWV both on the producer and processor front to prove

its value and has a valuable role to play in the sector in inspecting larders, processor plants and so on and reporting back or withholding scheme membership where the required standards are not met. We will be liaising with FSS over the sector action plan but this is no hollow threat. FSS intends to act. It will do so and will encourage local authorities with their powers of inspection of game larders to do likewise. It would certainly be of benefit to engage with SQWV and take advantage of their free assessment to establish whether your game larder is within the bounds of regulation and if not what is required to make it so, or to join the SQWV scheme.

Finally, a brief report on the Deer Health Survey being conducted by the Moredun Research Institute in conjunction with Edinburgh University.

The survey will determine (i) the prevalence of *E. coli* O157, a cause of human but not animal disease, in wild deer and (ii) determine where faecal contamination of carcasses is likely to occur during processing of venison from cull to final product

The project is led by Moredun Research Institute together with the University of Edinburgh

The project is funded by FSS and Scottish Government, with key involvement of the Scottish deer industry (ADMG, LDNS, FCS, SVP, SQWV)

Faecal samples have been collected by deer managers, gamekeepers and the forestry commission across the whole of Scotland to capture different regions and deer species

The project runs until June 2019, with the prevalence study due to finish in June 2018. To date the Moredun has processed almost 1000 faecal samples and is extremely pleased with the response it has received from the deer management sector to submit samples.

Added value projects include analysis of faecal samples for two types of parasite: cryptosporidium and parasitic worms. Tissue is also being archived for potential retrospective detection of Chronic Wasting Disease

Cross-contamination studies focusing on up to four AGHEs are currently underway.

A fuller report about SVP's work over the last 12 months can be found on the back of the latest newsletter but Bill and I are happy, or indeed are any of the other bodies from this end of the sector, to take questions.

Dick Playfair
Secretary
Scottish Venison Partnership