

# ALTERNATIVE INCOME FOR FARMS

## VENISON PRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

The deer farming industry in the UK is expanding, driven by increased domestic consumption of venison as it's considered a healthy premium red meat option. Retailers are looking to become less reliant on imports making venison an attractive option for farmers. Deer farming was pioneered in Scotland by the Hill Farming Research Organisation in 1968. This groundwork has enabled deer farming to develop globally, particularly in New Zealand where it has become a mainstream agricultural enterprise with proven management systems. The most common species currently farmed in the UK is the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*).



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### VENISON FARMING ADVANTAGES

1. Expanding UK industry with strong future growth potential
2. Much lower labour requirement than sheep farming
3. Minimal veterinary/medicine costs



### Setting up

1. **Is your farm suitable for deer?** Deer have a strong maternal instinct to seek privacy before calving and hide their calves for the first 3-5 days after birth so areas with cover for calves to hide in is desirable.
2. **Your pasture** - Lactating hinds and finishing stock respond well in terms of growth rates to good quality pasture and will preferentially graze clover and herbs such as chicory and plantain.
3. **Stocking Density** - One hind is broadly equivalent to two crossbred ewes in terms of stocking density so is there enough ground available to make a deer unit viable?
4. **Farming system** - A deer breeding herd has a similar management calendar to a spring calving suckler cow herd. Calves are generally weaned in the autumn then housed for the first winter and then turned onto quality pasture for finishing. Stags are normally sold finished at 16-18 months.
5. **Breeding Stock** - Source from established deer farms with high health status where possible. Good temperament is very important.

## ESTABLISHING COSTS

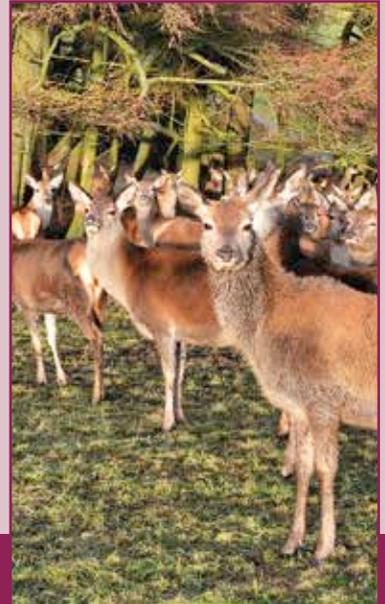
Yearling Hind	£350 - 500 (productive lifespan approx. 12-14 yrs)
Breeding Stag	£1,500 - £2,500
Fencing	£10/m (1.9m one piece deer net) £6/m topped up stock fence
Handling Facility	£10,000 - 15,000 depending on scale of unit and pen requirements

*\*information correct at time of publishing (02/2018)*

**Always be aware of the animal health status before purchasing.**

### Marketing and selling your product

- Where will you slaughter and sell your meat? Find out what the local demand is for the product i.e. private sales, restaurants, butchers
- Decide on your branding, USP's, web design and other routes to market
- Become a member of a producer group with a robust pricing and payment structure
- Farm shops and direct retailing can be rewarding especially for smaller units



### Next Steps

- Discuss and learn from others within the sector.
- Develop/identify a market.
- For further information and to move forward with your idea contact your local Development Officer or contact us on the details below.



### Contact us on:

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