

MAFDEER: What is it?

by Ken Drew, Invermay Agricultural Research Centre

MAF's COMMERCIAL deer consultancy, MAFDeer, will be launched at the 1987 NZDFA conference in Christchurch this month.

It is tempting for me to list MAF's credentials in "going commercial". After all, we had confidence in deer as long ago as 1973 and were part of the group which founded NZDFA in 1975. But I won't go down that pathway to any extent, because the future and not the past is our concern.

During the time we have been farming deer at Invermay we have tested our own ideas gained from experience. We have also worked closely with commercial deer farmers to test their methods and regularly reported our results in *The Deer Farmer*, at field days, at conferences, to numerous visitors and over the phone so that those starting out in deer and those already moving with deer farming could learn from our mistakes and our successes.

None of that is going to change. MAFDeer does not mean that all MAF expertise must now be purchased.

Articles and comments will still be written for such publications as *The Deer Farmer* and MAF staff will still take on assignments at conferences, seminars and workshops. But when it comes to working with people on specific management, technological or financial plans, then MAFDeer will operate as a commercial consultancy.

We don't believe that you "owe us a living", but rather that your investment in a MAFDeer contract will be good value for you. It is one thing to read Peter Fennessy's and Peter Dratch's articles about performance recording and animal breeding or Kerry Giles' and Julie McCall's articles about management or Geoff Asher's papers on Fallow farming, but it is quite another to translate that information into practical, medium-to-long term plans for individual properties.

Peter Dratch's excellent work on blood typing developments will continue, and how the methods can

be used to identify the extent of hybridisation, will continue to be reported. Where farmers wish to have blood typing done in their own herds there will be a charge.

Any consultancy can only be as good as the staff involved, and MAFDeer is no exception. The key person in MAFDeer is the manager, Tony Pearce, from Invermay. Tony has become well-known for his wide experience, practical knowledge and communication skills in the deer farming industry.



Invermay's Peter Fennessy (left) and Ken Drew with an unnamed colleague in the days before cost-plus research.

Resource people in MAFDeer include scientists, technicians, advisers, and economists, all of whom have had extensive first-hand experience in deer farming. The national team will meet together regularly to exchange information and to discuss problems. Where there are information gaps, investigational work will be done. I believe the deer industry can have full confidence in MAFDeer as a professional consultancy.

In the past MAF did research and gave advice. As a system it may have worked well, but it cannot continue because two events have dramatically altered MAF's operation.

During the next four years there will be a 40 to 50 per cent reduction in government funding to MAF research and advisory staff. Encouragement has been given to become commercial in order to "fill the gap" by earning income from work done.

On April 1, MAF's research and advisory division were largely combined into a new group called MAFTech.

MAFDeer has been launched in this new climate in the belief that the experience, management skill, research capacity and financial planning abilities of scientists, technicians, advisors and economists in most parts of New Zealand will give excellent value for money when work is carried out for deer farmers, companies, group investors or industry people.

If we had failed to take this approach, we would have had to reduce our deer research and development effort by nearly half over the next four years.

A young and dynamic industry such as deer farming has particularly benefited from research and we think it is not the time to drastically reduce our deer research programme nationwide. Increasingly an important part of MAF's deer activities are aimed at the product — venison:

How can we improve its storage life, its appearance, its palatability, its nutrient composition and how can we be certain that our overseas customers get exactly what they ordered to a consistently high standard of hygiene, presentation and specification? Effective work on the product venison is essential for both our exporters and producers.

MAFDeer is an investment in excellence. The deer industry is advancing and becoming increasingly complex. Consequently, skilled consultancies, where there is commitment to follow through on planning, offer a real potential for excellent returns on the money invested.

A successful MAF consultancy to the deer industry offers three major benefits:

- Allows deer farmers personalised access to MAFDeer advice should they seek it.
- Allows deer farmers the opportunity to get rapid access to new research information.
- Will promote ongoing deer research, in which New Zealand leads the world, and which is vital for the benefit of the industry as a whole. □