

Review of international session

446

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Introduction

This review serves as a sincere Congress vote of thanks to the international delegates for their preparation and presentations. It also has a secondary and equally important function. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the contacts and mutual gains made internationally through deer farming. On behalf of all New Zealand deer farmers and industry participants who have travelled, worked, learnt and been entertained in co-operation with so many friends in the international arena, this session marks that history and its benefits.

Many of those initial contacts are now long term friends, business partners and communicators on a personal and industry basis in virtually every corner of the world where deer are farmed.

The industry leaders that have presented their viewpoints in the international session have had that common theme, "communication in the basic, practical first experiences in deer farming".

In common, many of the early steps from all who enter this industry can be summarised by the simple quotation ... "Hey, it's okay to ask a lot of simple questions - it's better than facing up to a lot of basic mistakes." An absolute beginner's question can be as basic as, for instance, "What's a red deer (or fallow or rusa)?" The correct answer and definition, and the correct choice of species to farm, is absolutely critical as has been shown by the panellists today in their individual situations.

Review

In an ordinary day we generally learn something new, and this afternoon we have had an extraordinary day. In reviewing the diversity of international deer farming, rather than dwelling on each individual country in turn, it is more appropriate to focus on the common themes and thoughts presented.

New Zealand's geographical position and apparent isolation presents some difficulties in product relocation and marketing. It also can create an impression for our industries, and yours, that all countries are vastly different and remote, and that each of us faces the issues of developing deer farming in some isolation.

This Congress has forever changed that perception, just as the importation of superior deer genetics from North America, Europe (potentially Russia and Asia) has changed and improved our industry's productive base.

International Themes

A theme that is common to all participants, that links these presentations, is "How diverse are the things/issues/practicalities we have in common." The following summary points are key issues that each country has presented, and that each will recognise as important in their own country from another's industry perspective:

- A determination to succeed.
- The variability of environment, farm types and breeds (eg 12 species mentioned today).
- Controls imposed - deserved or undeserved.
- Interdependence of one country's industry on another's.
- Quality standards in product and in farming.

- Potential for the future.
- Market growth - a maturing phase.
- Consolidation and industry development.
- Resources combined for a single purpose.
- A strategic industry management plan.
- Levies available for interaction of government departments and industry for research and development.
- Rules - and the need for change in rules that don't apply to deer as farmed livestock.
- Unique positions, unique locations.
- Product excellence, welfare and care.
- Growth of interest and the need for information.
- A total dependence on the welfare and production of the herd.
- Diversity: tourism, recreation, hunting potential.
- Pasture-based production.
- Use of land resources in a safe and environmentally positive way.
- Lack of capital.
- Game management and hunting tradition as a precursor for the base information and understanding of the animal's behaviour and needs.
- Effective use of supplementary food resources.
- Research and development programmes guarantee success.

Animal Considerations

The animal, i.e. the most appropriate deer species to farm, share common features (with obvious extremes at both ends of the spectrum of family *Cervidae*) that make it an ideal farmed choice. Normally deer species that adapt well to traditional or modern farming systems show these features:

- A social, well organised, community within a herd structure.
- Behaviour that is highly responsive to the farm management systems we seek to impose on the species.
- Intelligence, vigour, health and extreme adaptability.

They are also polygamous, with a long lifespan, which allows many females to be concentrated as the basal unit within a herd.

Vigorous selection for superiority amongst males will improve genetic progress. This in turn allows large numbers of surplus males to be available for production (venison base). Females, through virtue of longevity, can in time be rigorously selected for disposal or dispersal in an expanding industry as live sales.

Often deer are available as a wild resource for selected harvest, or on-farm relocation, in substantial numbers.

Industry

In industry development terms availability, or lack of it, has a direct relationship to the speed and mode of industry expansion. Importation of stock from other sources has been widely practised, but sometimes at great cost and controversy. Huge political, social, practical responsibilities must be taken if native wildlife resources are to be used, or importation strategies adopted for farming.

The issues of ownership, health and disease risk to the native population and the response of the public to farming are important. Many of these are positive. The excellence of the technology and practical management of farming deer are important to positive perceptions of farming from the public.

On the negative side, farming deer can be a very emotive issue with the public and politicians alike. Deer have always had a place in story books, in history and in hunting rights, and evoke very powerful images. Public response to the concept is very important to the long term success of deer farming as both a recreation and alternative livestock industry.

Management

In common, and perhaps most importantly internationally, our major responsibility in farming deer are the responses we must put in place once our animals are confined behind fences or enclosures. The animals have had their ability to choose whether they exit this particular environment or not removed. By enclosure, we take responsibility for animal welfare and well being, for natural behaviour, for proper feeding and care in handling. Deer, as today's session has shown, universally have incredible and positive adaptability to virtually every agricultural situation imaginable. Farmers inherently learn to understand the interaction of feed requirements and seasonality in reproduction and antler growth, and also the very powerful genetic tools available for herd development and improvement. For example, contrast the walled enclosures of sika deer in

China with the managed migratory reindeer of the Saami people.

individual contributions of the international participants.

Enclosure demands the ability to yard and handle deer and systems evolved rapidly, with a common goal of reducing stress on both farmer and animal. Safe, repeatable procedures for preventative health, identification and performance recording and practical farm management all follow.

Development Paths

The industry has relied on its pioneers and visionaries, often successful individuals from other walks of life, but equally often hunters, conservationists and the universal farmer who becomes intrigued by the concept. None operate without strong commitment from family and friends. Their enthusiasm and success has been the public projection of an expanding industry that in turn attracts others.

With the advancement of science and technology worldwide, we have enormous responsibility to look at issues like breeding and cross-breeding, selection, and at the commercial objectives of these programmes. We must ensure that we are doing the correct thing in terms of the animal and its behaviour. For example, the Père David's cross-breeding project has a fascination for genetic study, but in looking at this animal in a commercial situation we must be aware of the risks and gains we take.

Finally, all countries eventually deal with product and the world's industries clearly are subscribing to excellence of product and its quality. This Congress is an opportunity to present the New Zealand industry and its evolution towards this goal of quality of production, and perhaps present that as a world-wide goal. Our base of understanding of deer and deer farming has greatly increased with the presentation of our international delegates and friends, the identification of the features we have in common, and the realisation that our common basis is so different in detail, but consistent in principle.

In thanking the speakers for their contributions it has been as much an honour to review an international session as it has been - as so many New Zealanders have also done - to visit, work and enjoy developing deer farming around the world, in the 16 countries represented in this session. Those common features are similarly reflected in the excellence of stewardship of the Congress Chairman, Sir Peter Elworthy, this afternoon; and I invite the delegates to acknowledge his chairmanship, and the