

Farming Systems



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Husbandry Systems

There are two basic systems for enclosed deer, although many farms fall somewhere between the two.

1. **Park** – Deer are raised in a park type setting, where they are able to roam freely with minimal input. They may be provided with some supplemental feed, calves are unlikely to be weaned, nor antlers removed, stock is not housed and management is generally with a rifle. When contact with the deer is minimal, they may be classified as being wild and not farmed and as a consequence the slaughter and carcass handling procedures are those applicable to wild deer. Other parks consider their deer farmed and follow the requirements for farmed deer at slaughter; these may be organic whereas wild deer cannot be.
2. **Farm** – Deer may be farmed following the conventional agricultural practices, including organic, grazing is rotated, some or all stock may be housed in the winter (not all year round). Nutritional and mineral supplements are provided when necessary to maintain the deer's health, injuries and health problems receive prompt veterinary attention. Calves are usually weaned, antlers, certainly of the young stock, are removed on safety grounds.

Deer farmers following the second husbandry system fall into various categories:

- a. **Calf rearers** – produce calves for finishing elsewhere, the calves will either be moved a month or so after weaning (Nov/Dec) or at the end of the winter to be turned onto summer grazing. Handling facilities may be limited to a collecting yard, small pens and means of shedding off the calves and splitting the hinds into management groups. The majority of stag calves will be sold as stores for venison; hind calves may be sold as either stores for venison or kept for breeding stock replacements.
- b. **Calf finishers** – buy in calves for finishing on summer grazing, they may house them in the first winter. These farms tend to be located where grazing is good and/or there are plentiful vegetable by-products to supplement the winter feed. If the stock is to be sent off farm to be slaughtered, the yearling stags will require their antlers to be removed in the early autumn, prior to being transported. This necessitates an efficient method of individual restraint, either a drop floor crush or a hydraulic crush. The handling facility may also have provision for weighing and will be used for grading and sorting stock, administration of wormers etc. A small proportion may be sold as breeding stock, but the primary purpose is venison production. The finisher may need to hold some stock over all or part of the second winter.
- c. **Breeder, finishers** – produce calves and finish them, a proportion of the progeny will be for the breeding stock replacements, some farms have developed a good reputation for breeding stock, other have concentrated on the quality finished stock for venison. If the stock is to be abattoir slaughtered or sold off the unit live, a crush and handling facilities will be available. Many now operate closed units with the exception of the introduction of occasional breeding stags. Some are TB accredited.
- d. **Producers, processors** – a proportion of producers also retail all or some of their own stock, they will usually slaughter on the farm and may either have the carcass dressed at a local abattoir or in their own farmed game processing facility. To meet demand they may supplement their own production with deer from other farms. On-farm slaughter may be either in the field or in a crush/crate, if the system is farm slaughter, the stags may not be de-antlered and a crush may be considered unnecessary.