

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
5th March 2018

WILD VENISON MARKETING FEASIBILITY STUDY

Purpose

To inform members of the outcomes of the Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcomes the 'Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' and endorses the conclusions and recommendations.

Key Issues

- It is widely accepted that deer are more abundant and widespread in the wild now than at any time in the past 1000 years.
- The 'Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' has been concluded and published on-line.
- The Deer Initiative undertook the study, interviewing nearly 500 people, and proposing 8 Recommendations.
- In the report, the situation with feral wild boar was also included in discussions.
- Funding is now being sought to implement some of the recommendations.

Reasons

The 'Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' is available at http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/images/uploads/general/Venison_report_final.pdf. The Study considers the current situation regarding wild deer managed in and around the Wye Valley AONB, where venison is processed and sold, and how it is marketed. It also investigates whether there are opportunities to develop a local market for wild venison and what stages of the supply chain need to be developed to ensure it can be supplied, processed, distributed and marketed locally. The focus of the study area encompasses the lower half of the Wye Valley AONB from Symonds Yat in the north to Chepstow in the south and westwards across eastern Monmouthshire between The Hendre and Wentwood. This area has a high deer population and consequently the associated impacts on woodlands and habitats are greater.

The Deer Initiatives interviewed 476 people as part of the Study. Questions were asked to people through both an online survey and face-to-face. The online survey was circulated to landowners, and other interested individuals via email through partner organisations. Face to face questions were asked in butchers, restaurants and pubs and to stalkers in the project area. The general public were also questioned in and around these outlets, as well as at the Monmouthshire Show.

Implications

The conclusions and recommendations of the Study are as follows:

Conclusions (see pages 14-15 of the Study)

- While a purpose built facility to provide a location for stalkers to use to process their wild venison is unlikely to succeed, there are a number of opportunities around marketing, promotion and training to increase the proportion of local wild venison remaining in the local market.
- Overall, everyone interviewed face-to-face and those who completed the online survey seemed responsive to a quality and provenance scheme, which would guarantee local venison be sold in local markets. However, many areas of the potential market are unaware of the many positive reasons behind choosing to eat wild venison.
- Members of the public would benefit from education as to why venison is hunted in the UK, and how this benefits the natural ecosystem. This can be seen in the 73% of people who would be encouraged to buy Local Wild Venison if these benefits were highlighted in comparison to only 5% to whom this would make no difference to their opinion on the meat.
- The end consumers may also benefit from instruction in how best to prepare venison. While conducting the face-to-face interviews, it became apparent that while many people were aware how to cook venison, a large proportion were unsure how best to prepare the meat and stated that they have been unimpressed with the taste, whether too gamey or tough to eat. However, if prepared sympathetically to its natural flavour and cooked correctly venison is a very flavourful meat. This has been seen whenever live demonstrations have been carried out, the feedback has always been very positive from all sides and those that have tried the final product have been pleasantly surprised. Providing customers with recipe cards on how to prepare dishes that people wouldn't normally try, placed in butchers or supermarkets for example to encourage people to buy venison over other meats and in doing so, have a positive experience with it, could have broad benefits.
- It is also clear that most consumers are not aware that there are huge differences in flavour and texture let alone size of joints between the different species as well as the health benefits of including venison in diets. Few people understand the nutritional benefits of wild venison. With the growing concerns over obesity and high cholesterol related problems it is quite possible that a venison based menu could be of benefit to many people (appendix 4)
- While making recipe ideas available to members of the public, it may be worthwhile to provide a similar marketing scheme or tasting session to chefs in restaurants to encourage them to include a broader variety of venison recipes in their menus. Some chefs believe that marinating in red wine is a vital ingredient when cooking venison yet in reality white wine

often produces a better flavour and often marinating is unnecessary. A tasting session would also be an excellent place to increase awareness of Local Wild Venison and its availability in local markets.

- It appears that butchers and restaurants are able to stock local Wild Venison, but there is no value currently being added to the product by stating its provenance, promoting its health benefits or advising on how best to cook it. Promotional activity involving suppliers, retailers and consumers is required to encourage more people to eat wild venison, thereby encouraging retail outlets to stock more venison and give suppliers more reason to sell their venison locally rather than via game dealers. It is possible that if an advisory information pack were produced this could go a long way to dispelling many of the misunderstandings and myths relating to Wild Venison.

Recommendations (spread throughout pages 9 – 14 of the Study)

Recommendation 1 - Increase awareness of how to cook venison to achieve the best from its natural flavour will help increase sales, including through cooking demonstrations and recipe cards.

Recommendation 2 – Establish a marketing &/or education campaign promoting and making clear the ecological benefits of Wild Venison over traditional farmed meats.

Recommendation 3 – Butchers are the main source of venison over other outlets, therefore a marketing campaign targeting butchers could prove to be the most effective method of increasing sales. However, it should be noted butchers may have limited space to store &/or display more venison.

Recommendation 4 – More work is required to establish the most suitable ‘brand’ and how this would be administered in practice.

Recommendation 5 - Offering ongoing training, encouraging stalkers to continue to improve, shooting skills and use of appropriate bullets, should reduce the amount of venison being unnecessarily lost to the food supply chain.

Recommendation 6 - It is possible that there may be some benefit in raising awareness of the legislation through the creation of a document which is easier to navigate than the current Wild Game Guide, and perhaps one aimed directly at stalkers. Having a simplified document should remove any confusion surrounding the legislation which currently exists throughout the stalking community and lower the risk of stalkers unknowingly acting outside of the laws surrounding game.

Recommendation 7 – There is an opportunity to provide training / advice to butchers on the differences in taste between deer species, along with promoting the opportunity to freeze venison in a variety of forms for sale throughout the year. Additional storage may be required for butchers to make this practical.

Recommendation 8 – If a local food hub was developed, local wild venison should be included. Supply of local wild venison would need to be highlighted as an opportunity to potential wild venison suppliers, eg. through the Deer Management Group.

The AONB Unit have been investigating funding opportunities to progress the Recommendations. Natural England agreed to provide some modest funding to take forward Recommendations 3 & 7 on the English side of the Valley. An application to Natural Resources Wales for a more comprehensive delivery of the recommendations has been unsuccessful. Other options are now being considered.

Background

The 'Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' was prepared by the Deer Initiative, commissioned by the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership, and funded by the Vale of Usk Local Action Group (LAG) under the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, Natural England and the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund, a Welsh Assembly Government initiative in the Wye Valley AONB.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Investigate the current situation with venison supply and distribution of carcasses across the area and by whom the venison is being supplied by.
- Research the potential demand for locally sourced wild venison.
- Investigate the opportunities for supplying wild venison into local outlets including butchers, restaurants and pubs and food hubs and distribution centres.
- Determine the interest among Lower Wye Valley Deer Management Group (LWVDMG) members and other local venison suppliers, to supply wild venison into the local food chain.
- Establish the location and availability of facilities for the storage, butchery and distribution of carcasses and determining if there is an opportunity for linking with or cross promoting the supply of other local meat products, both farmed and wild, including wild boar.
- Establish the steps necessary to fill gaps in the existing local supply chain to include but not restricted to butchery skills, distribution and seasonality of supply.
- Raise awareness of the marketing opportunities to suppliers and sales outlets and outline the brand values.
- Make recommendations as to future steps needed to ensure sustainable supply and sales of locally sourced wild venison, including branding opportunities.