

Elk Industry Blooms In North America

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Farmers, ranchers, and off-farm investors are turning from their everyday enterprises in record numbers to join the elk industry.

Elk sales repeatedly broke records in the U.S. and Canada in 1995 and the first quarter of 1996, as new breeders entered the business and existing operations expanded and upgraded.

"The farmed elk industry has become a leading 'alternative' livestock enterprise," said Marty Stallings, president of the North American Elk Breeders Association (NAEBA) and an elk breeder from Westcliffe, Colo. "Elk breeding is quickly moving into its own as more and more farmers and ranchers add elk to their business operations."

One sign of that movement was exhibited at the 1996 Denver National Livestock Exposition this past January. An overflow

crowd at the elk auction and record sales prices prompted Expo officials to offer the main arena for next year's sale.

The growth in interest and financial commitments being made also was evident at the recent annual convention of NAEBA. Delmont Sunderland and Seth Richards were among the 600 members attending this year's annual meeting of the 5-year-old organization. Sunderland and his wife Bobbi have been raising elk for four years on their farm near Huntingdon, Pa. Richards and Nicole Auman are in their third year raising elk near Petersburg, Pa. The two couples were recognized at the convention for their activities in supporting and promoting the industry.

"Promotion of this industry is probably the easiest part of my job as an elk breeder," said Richards. "People are naturally attracted to

these majestic animals. One reason we as an industry have been growing so rapidly is that sharing our enjoyment of elk provides social as well as economic returns."

Richards has 10 cows calving this spring and doesn't plan to sell any animals this year. The Sunderlands have 54 cows expected to calve this spring on their ranch. They market mostly young animals for breeding stock and also sell the velvet stage antlers from their bulls. This renewable resource is highly regarded as a health supplement in many Asian countries and is gaining popularity in this country as well.

An interest in good health, not to mention good taste, is also creating a strong market for elk meat, suggests Stallings. "It fits the health conscious consumer's demand for a low cholesterol, lean protein source that tastes good," he said.

Like many of their fellow breeders, the Sunderlands will be offering a number of animals for sale this year. With the industry setting new price highs, the temptation to sell more animals is high, but Sunderland is reinvesting in the future of the elk industry, one he expects to stay strong for many years to come, thanks to the multiple markets for elk products.

"In the four years I have been involved in this industry, I have been impressed by its dramatic growth," said Sunderland. "It is still a young industry, with years to go before we reach the point where we stop producing animals



Delmont Sunderland of Huntingdon, Pa., received special recognition for his efforts to promote the elk industry from Marty Stallings, left, president of the North American Elk Breeders, at the organization's recent convention in Kansas City, Mo.



Seth Richards and Nichole Auman of Petersburg, Pa., received special recognition for their efforts to promote the elk industry from Marty Stallings, left, president of the North American Elk Breeders, at the organization's recent convention in Kansas City, Mo.

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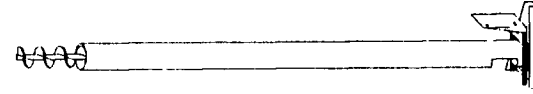
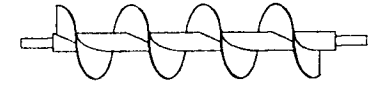
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