



HANDLING AND YARDS

Excerpt from "Deer Farming Handbook" (2003).

General

Quality Assurance

The Australian Deer Industry has developed an industry Quality Assurance (QA) Program that sets out the minimum requirements for the transport and handling of deer.

The Deer Industry QA Board manages the QA program. The Board ensures that industry assessors are appropriately trained, issues QA accreditation certificates, amends and updates industry QA manuals as necessary and deals with industry related QA issues.

Management and transport practices described by the QA program aim to:

- Minimize carcass bruising
- Minimize hide damage
- Ensure welfare requirements of deer are maintained
- Encourage safe management and handling practices
- Minimize carcass, hid and co-product contamination (bacteria, chemicals, etc)
- Reduce reliance on costly 'end-point' inspection of carcasses in abattoirs
- Provide consumer confidence in products supplied by the Australian Deer industry to all markets
- Maximize returns to producers

The program encourages the Deer Industry's conformation to accepted international quality assurance programs and standards. It provides market protection for products by guaranteeing the quality of its products, in particular food products.

The program recognizes the vital, inescapable, role farmers have in the food quality chain and its adoption of the Deer Industry QA Program by all Australian deer farmers is strongly encouraged.

Management considerations described below are based on QA principles that encourage the production of consistently high quality meats.

Handling Principles

There are a multitude of deer yard designs used for Red deer, and most have good and bad features. Most yard systems have a series of progressively smaller pens, with or without swinging gates to assist in drafting. Once in pens, animals can be moved with minimum stress into the crush for most operations – drenching, ear tagging, vaccinating and velvet removal. Various types of crush or cradle are available commercially and the inclusion of scales is important for many management programs. A well-designed crush reduces risk of injury to operators.

A handling shed should:

- Utilize light strategically to facilitate the movement of the deer
- Have either forcing or sliding gates leading to the crush so deer cannot push back past the gate
- Have smooth walls to meet quality assurance requirements. Plywood or conveyor belting can be used
- Provide adequate ventilation and controlled lighting
- Facilitate efficient flow of stock through the facility and the ability to draft animals from the mob
- Have a cradle or crush set on a set of scales. The cradle or crush should have a collapsible floor and/or adjustable sides to allow the animal to be immobilized and handled safely and efficiently
- Hard or concrete floors should be covered in sand, wood chips or saw dust to minimize injuries that can occur when deer slip on exposed hard floors

When handling deer in the yards the herd should be split into small groups for ease of handling.

Generally:

- Mature males should not be held in the same pen as fawns/calves or females due to their aggressive behavior, particularly when in the restricted area of the pen
- Mature males and females should not be yarded during the mating season when males are aggressive
- If fawns/calves are yarded with their mothers, care must be taken to ensure they are not trampled
- Males in hard antler should never be yarded. Male deer should be velveted or have their antlers removed when velvet begins to strip
- Male deer give warning of aggression by grinding their teeth, lolling tongue and rolling eyes and flattening their ears against their head.

Refer to *“Deer Farming Handbook”* for further information.