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PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME New Zealand

The Productivity Improvement Programme (run by the Deer Industry New Zealand) hopes to increase sustainable profitability across the deer industry. The program has had input from six stakeholders from different areas across the production chain. There were up to 30 people involved in the process, all leaders in their fields ranging from farmers and processors to scientists and marketers. After a year's work, 15 proposals were received. All were designed to improve profitability by achieving the goal of "more deer, heavier, earlier and better".

Mark O'Connor, from Deer Industry New Zealand, believes that not all initiatives will be approved or undertaken as there was a need to prioritise and focus.

Five of the six stakeholders have outlined their goals as follows:

1. **The Processing Group**, venison processors and marketers have developed, for the first time, a definition of an ideal venison carcass - with a target of 65kg (up from 54kg-55kg).
2. **The Feeding Group** is developing feeding and growth pathways for deer, so farmers could meet the 65kg carcass target cost-effectively.
3. **The Value Chain Group** has mapped the whole value chain for the first time (from growing pasture through to meat sale) and a model has been created to show what happens to the bottom line when production, yield or costs change.
4. **The Genetics Group** suggests realising the genetic potential of deer by using a genetic evaluation software system to produce venison according to market requirements.
5. **The Deer Health Group** has identified that many of the technologies to lift production are already available to farmers and processors. Adoption is the issue.

The group has set a target of every deer farmer having an individually tailored, annually reviewed, formally constructed animal health plan based on a risk assessment process.

For an industry that was once known for its volatility, over the past four years, the venison price had varied only 7%, despite a 32% higher New Zealand dollar and the global recession. DINZ statistics mention that the weighted average venison schedule over the past four years had been \$8/kg. In the oncoming season, prices once again appear strong, with spring schedules likely to be in the \$8/kg-\$9/kg range.

At present in New Zealand, the land-use for both the dairy and the forestry sectors is very competitive. The Productivity Improvement Programme aims to translate science and knowledge into business practices and show how to take that information and run a better, smarter business more efficiently.

An initial part of the programme was to survey deer farmers to better understand their attitude to change and how they prefer to learn. The resulting report is being used to develop strategies when communicating with farmers. The next problem may be to convince farmers of the long term benefits.