

Minnesota is Rich Breeding Ground for America's Greatest Animal

For beauty, grace, heartiness, value and versatility, it's hard to beat elk as a candidate for America's greatest animal, says Brenda Hartkopf of the Minnesota Elk Breeders Association. "When you consider its lean, healthy meat, the health properties of velvet antler, the appeal of trophy bulls and their antlers, and their low-maintenance relative to other livestock, elk really is America's greatest animal." She should know. She breeds elk along with Minnesota's 300 other elk farmers who capitalize on the diverse markets for elk meat, antlers, trophy bulls, and breeding stock.

With concerns about antibiotics and growth hormones in beef, elk's natural immunity to most disease gives it an edge over other meats. It's also high in protein, and low in fat and cholesterol, making it a diet solution for meat lovers who are concerned about their weight as well as heart patients and diabetics concerned about their health. In a USDA comparison, elk comes out on top in key nutritional categories against beef, pork, and chicken.

Breeding for antler size makes sense with an international multi-million dollar market for elk velvet antler dietary supplements for the treatment of arthritis pain. Popular in China as a general health-giving nutrient for 2000 years, velvet antler has been shown in western studies to be an effective treatment for osteoarthritis. Laboratory studies suggest that the essential nutrients of velvet antler have anti-inflammatory properties that fight the effects of arthritis. Velvet antler nutrients such as chondroitin sulfate and collagen support the restoration of joint structure and function.

Elk is one of the most highly prized trophies in the U.S., and Minnesota breeders have a reputation around the country for excellence as a source of the best trophy elk for hunting preserves. It's all in the genes. Elk thrive in Minnesota's climate, and because of their adaptation can be bred here for greater genetic superiority and growth than in many other regions. Elk are native to North America and are one of the most exciting and rewarding animals to hunt. Their large size, unique bugle and majestic antlers draw serious hunters to take on the challenge of pursuing the greatest animal in America. Minnesota ranchers breed for body size, color, conformation, and antler production. Animals not measuring up to one market are desirable in others.

Elk typically conceive in early fall and calving begins in late May and early June. Heifers can conceive at around sixteen months of age. Selective breeding to enhance desired traits has greatly increased the genetic potential of farmed elk. Artificial insemination is commonly used, with a success rate of 50%-80%. With years of selective breeding, Minnesota bulls have achieved tremendous antler length, creating trophy bulls not found in the wild.

The elk breeding business is relatively inexpensive to participate in. Elk cost 66% less to maintain than cattle, the bulk of the advantage stemming from lower expenses for feed and care of the elk.

For more information about America's Greatest Animal, contact the Minnesota Elk Breeder's Association at info@mneba.org or <http://www.mneba.org>.