

## Minnesota Is Top Breeder of “America’s Greatest Animal”

Minnesota’s 300 plus elk breeders are poised to expand markets for products from what they call “America’s Greatest Animal.” It’s their love of the versatile, majestic breed that has them anteing up to get in the game and stay there. “It’s very exciting to be in the elk business right now,” says Brenda Hartkopf of the Minnesota Elk Breeder’s Association and longtime elk rancher. Minnesota is the largest producer of elk products in the nation, and has launched plans to expand opportunities for elk breeders throughout the state.

The business opportunities for elk breeders in Minnesota are many and varied. Unlike any other animal, elk is an excellent source of red meat, health-giving nutraceutical velvet antler, breeding stock, and trophy bulls, hide, and hard-antler products.

### ELK Is A Zero-Carb Meat Alternative

With the help of organizations like the Minnesota Elk Breeders’ Association, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI), and Minnesota Grown, farmers are benefiting from broad support as they start up or expand elk operations, in part to meet increasing demand for lean, high-protein, low-cholesterol meats.

Elk is lower in fat than beef, pork, and chicken, making it a healthy, attractive alternative. A comparison of other important attributes reveals significant advantages of elk.

Meat	Calories	Fat (grams)	Cholesterol (milligrams)	Protein (grams)
Elk	146	1.9	73	30.2
Chicken	190	7.4	89	28.9
Beef	211	9.3	86	29.8
Pork	212	9.7	86	29.3

*(A comparison of fat, calories, cholesterol, and protein reveals the significant statistical advantages of elk.)*

### Velvet Antler

According to scientific research, velvet antler has multiple health-giving properties for people—from bone and joint health, anti-aging properties, enhanced immune system function, growth hormone and muscle development, diet and weight management, and overall sports nutrition. Studies also show velvet antler’s anti-inflammatory properties in dogs that suffer from arthritis pain. This is not news to many, as velvet antler has been a fundamental medical ingredient in Traditional Chinese Medicine for over 2000 years. The Minnesota Elk Breeder’s Association reports that the Asian market has historically paid \$20 to \$120 a pound for elk velvet and has strong enough demand to consume as much as North American farmers can supply.

### Bull Market for Trophies

The strongest market for Minnesota elk right now is in trophy bulls destined for hunting preserves—a longstanding tradition that serves a diverse clientele. According to recent numbers, elk hunts may bring anywhere from \$3,000 to \$25,000 and more, depending on the type of hunt and size of elk. Elk preserves are growing in demand as more hunters seek an authentic experience but can’t travel to wilderness destinations. And Minnesota stands out as an excellent source of trophy bulls. According to Hartkopf, Minnesota elk are the envy of many other states. “They love Minnesota elk for their size, their antlers, and the excellent genetic quality of our animals,” she says. Years of selective breeding have produced magnificent trophy bulls not found in the wild.

### Breeding Stock

Because of Minnesota’s exceptional climate, the state is a rich resource for elk that are superior in size and heartiness. Breeders capitalize on Minnesota’s cooler climate to produce top velveting herds. Ranchers typically breed for body size, color, and antler production. Elk are a herd-orientated animal and are easy to handle with proper facilities and management.

### Elk’s Artistic Appeal

Artisans admire the beauty of elk ivories (eye teeth) and use them to create unique jewelry pieces. Hard antler is used to make unique chandeliers, table lamps, furniture, knife handles, belt buckles and other creative pieces. The suppleness and strength of elk leather is regarded among the finest of the world’s natural skin products and is used for coats, gloves, boots and more.

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