

Herd health of whitetail deer

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Abstract

New deer farms are starting up all the time. The owners of these new farms may have little or no animal husbandry experience. A basic overview of the behavior, housing, and vaccine strategies will help you guide your client to a successful endeavor into the rewarding industry of deer propagation.

Key words: deer, health, diseases

Résumé

De nouvelles fermes de cerfs commencent tout le temps. Les propriétaires de ces nouvelles fermes ont peu ou pas d'expérience d'élevage. Une présentation de base du comportement, du logement, et des stratégies vaccinales vous aideront à guider votre client d'une entreprise couronnée de succès dans l'industrie des cerfs de propagation enrichissante.

Introduction

Our end goal is healthy, productive deer herd that provides our client with a successful financial future. Environment should provide: adequate space, cover, structure, and low stress.

The space in the deer pen is vitally important to the health of the animal. Overcrowding causes huge death losses annually. Learn to recognize it and don't be afraid to tell your client about your thoughts. Stocking density of 10 deer per acre has been reported in the literature but a lot depends on region and local variables. (Lay of the land, amount of forested areas, and length of the growing season) Cover and structure lead to decreased stress in whitetails and stress is huge to deer. Feral dogs, coyotes, and even your behavior in the pen can lead to undue stress. Always take measures to reduce these. Consider pasture rotation if your client is able. The benefits in deer are the same as they are in cattle.

Nutrition varies, but most deer will be fed some sort of grain ration free choice. Rations may be pelleted or textured. Deer are pushed to eat as much grain as possible. Some are custom mixes and there are really good commercial feeds available now. With rations being fed free choice, acidosis and laminitis can be a problem. Forage is the limiting factor. They eat high quality dry alfalfa best, but fermented alfalfa is also being used.

A clean water source is vital to any animals' health. It's where the water and feed are located that can be a problem. Any areas where animals congregate in pasture tend to become muddy. Keep feeders & waters on the higher elevation areas in the pen. Moveable feeders and tile drainage where appropriate can help tremendously. Gravel feed areas if need be.

It's always easier to prevent disease than it is to cure it after it's there. Maintaining a closed herd is best if at all possible. If animals are to be added, a quarantine pen is a must. Domestic livestock should be kept separate from whitetails. We need to educate our clients about the rules that we, as veterinarians, have to operate under.

Vaccinations will vary according to location and previous disease. There are no commercially available vaccines for deer so we are left with off label use of commercial livestock vaccines or autogenous products. Keep AMDUCA in mind if using medications off label.

You will have to advise your client on vaccines. It's impossible to try and vaccinate for everything that can cause problems in deer. You will need to prioritize, which makes autogenous vaccines more affective.

Our autogenous vaccine contains:

- Four E-coli
- Arcanobacterium pyogenes
- Two Fusobacterium necrophorum
- Mycoplasma bovis
- Pastuerella multocida
- Biberstina trehalosi
- Clostridial perfringens Type A

I generally recommend deworming every three months. Possibly more often in overcrowded conditions. Feed additive anthelmintics can be sorted. Injectables require restraint. Pour-ons we have no studies on effectiveness. Pick your poison.

Controlling stress in whitetails is huge. Factors that increase stress include: unsanitary conditions, lack of shelter/cover, overcrowding, co-mingling, handling, tranquilization

The healthiest deer herds are those that are not overcrowded and don't do anything with their deer. Testing for diseases, artificial insemination and anything else that causes the deer stress leads to health problems.