



## STATE NEWS

Wednesday January 25, 2012

**Deer farmers call for move to Department of Agriculture**by Zack Harold  
Daily Mail staff

West Virginia's deer farmers are again petitioning the Legislature to move them from the Division of Natural Resources' jurisdiction to the Department of Agriculture.

Deer farmers say the move would free their businesses from the DNR's strict regulations, though DNR officials say putting deer into the private sector is a step in the wrong direction.

There are about 40 deer farms in West Virginia. Lanny Clay, 55, runs the "Buck Acres" deer farm in Barboursville. He got his first deer three months ago and has one buck, three does and three female fawns.

Clay said he's been around cattle all his life but there isn't much money in raising cows. Selling trophy bucks to hunting preserves, however, can be quite lucrative.

Some farm-raised big-rack bucks are worth more than \$50,000. Clay spent \$25,000 to start his deer farm and expects to make that money back in three years.

But Clay's options for selling deer in West Virginia are limited. Under current DNR rules, he can sell his deer only to hunting preserves or other farmers in the state.

Clay can also sell his animals across state lines but cannot bring any out-of-state deer back into West Virginia.

Randy Tucker, a DNR biologist who manages the agency's deer farm program, said the restrictions help prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease, an illness similar to mad cow disease.

State deer farmers want the regulations loosened. Farmers in Michigan and Texas have bred deer with racks twice the size of a West Virginia trophy buck.

If West Virginia farmers could bring in bucks from across state lines, Clay said this state could produce similar trophies. And big-rack bucks translate to big-time paychecks.

Tucker pointed out farmers can buy deer semen from other states to use for artificial insemination. But there are also rules for interstate deer semen purchases: farmers cannot purchase semen from states where chronic wasting disease was identified within the last 60 months.

State deer farmers also would like to sell meat from their animals. Red deer and elk can be slaughtered and sold in West Virginia but most state farmers raise whitetail deer, and selling whitetail deer meat is against DNR rules.

Clay said there wouldn't be much money in the venture, but selling meat could help recoup some of his costs. Deer that grow up with small or malformed antlers are virtually impossible to sell.

"Basically nobody wants to buy them. A lot of times, you just have to kill them to get rid of them," he said.

Tammy Grandia, who runs Skyline Farms in Mason County, said the DNR's regulations make it difficult to grow an agriculture business.

In 2002, chronic wasting disease was found at a deer farm Wisconsin. West Virginia's DNR responded to the outbreak by freezing all transportation of farmed deer. Grandia couldn't bring two deer home from a friend's house, a short drive away. The ban lasted more than three years.

Grandia worries that if chronic wasting disease were ever spotted at a deer farm under the DNR's jurisdiction the agency would institute another freeze on the deer transportation.

She said if deer farms fell under the Department of Agriculture's jurisdiction, officials would handle a chronic wasting disease outbreak as it would any other livestock ailment, with farm- or even pen-specific quarantines.

"They would handle it like they would chickens, pigs, cows," she said.

Tucker said chronic wasting disease might be more difficult to treat than other barnyard illnesses. He said deer can have the disease for years before exhibiting symptoms and, once a farm has its first case of the disease, more are likely to follow.

"You get it, you've got it forever. There's no known way to get rid of chronic wasting disease. It's in the soil, it's in everything," he said.

Agriculture department officials say they would welcome deer farmers to the fold.

Spokesman Buddy Davidson said the department already has experience inspecting farms and checking animals for disease, and deer farming would seem a natural fit.

"We see no reason they couldn't be under the Department of Agriculture. It's the condition the animal is kept in, not the species, that determines whether they're a farmed animal or not," he said.

Agriculture Commissioner Gus Douglass said the state needs to do away with its stiff regulations on interstate deer shipments. He said deer import restrictions prevent farmers from introducing new, more desirable genetics into their herds and loosening the rules would increase the number of deer farmers in the state.

Tucker said making deer into a business is against the DNR's principles. He said under West Virginia law, deer are considered wildlife even if they've been raised in captivity.

"Obviously deer are wildlife and we maintain they should remain under our jurisdiction," he said.

"The wildlife belongs to the public. Because it belongs to the public, they have a say in how it's managed and how it's utilized. Whenever you put it into the private sector, that ability is lost."

Tucker said most farm-raised deer in West Virginia are destined for hunting preserves. When a buck's rack is large enough, the animal is sedated, loaded onto a trailer and transported to the preserve, where a customer will pay to hunt it.

"It was bred and raised to be a freak. That is not hunting. It's not a fair chase," he said.

John Rose runs "Gone Huntin' Whitetails" in Philippi, a 15-acre farm with about 45 deer.

Rose started his farm in 2005. He's worked with lawmakers for the last six legislative sessions to get deer farms moved under the agriculture department's jurisdiction and will try again this year.

He said previous deer farming bills have died in committee, despite having 85 or 90 percent support among House and Senate members.

"Our bill every year gets tabled in a committee or pulled for reconsideration right before it goes to the floor," he said. "It's politics. I feel that the DNR has a little more influence with the leadership."

Still, Rose has high hopes for the 2012 legislative session. The West Virginia Deer Farmers Association had a venison luncheon at the Capitol last week.

Rose said the group fed more than 200 delegates and senators.

"We stand an excellent chance of getting this bill put through, if it would just go through the democratic process without backroom interference," he said.

This year's legislation, House Bill 2527, was introduced on Jan. 11. It hasn't seen any movement since then, according to the Legislature's bill tracking website.

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#### COMMENTS

5 Comments

Posted By: rcj112

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So let me get this straight. Gus Douglas wants to stop people from transferring a bug in fire wood from one location to another in the state, but he's all for transporting a potential danger to humans from other states to this one? What's wrong with this picture?

Posted By: WVBowhunter

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Pen raised deer are a disaster waiting to happen..get rid of em and stop the practice

Posted By: Harley002

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I have been a deer hunter all my life and a very successful one. Raising deer on a farm, turning it loose in a field and letting someone shoot it is not hunting. It is killing and the ones doing the killing are to lazy to hunt.

All deer farming in the USA should be illegal as far as I am concerned. They are not live stock and were not put on this earth to be live stock.

Posted By: flounder

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greetings,

i would kindly like to submit some additional information, on the real threat these game farms pose to animals and humans. they are nothing more than a petri dish for the cwd tse prion agent, and in my opinion, should all be banned. don't believe me, see for yourself...

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE CWD WISCONSIN Almond Deer (Buckhorn Flats) Farm Update DECEMBER 2011

The CWD infection rate was nearly 80%, the highest ever in a North American captive herd.

9 GAME FARMS IN WISCONSIN TEST POSITIVE FOR CWD

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/nrboard/2011/december/12-11-2b2.pdf>

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<http://chronic-wasting-disease.blogspot.com/2011/12/chronic-wasting-disease-cwd-wisconsin.html>

Sunday, January 22, 2012

Chronic Wasting Disease CWD cervids interspecies transmission

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kind regards,  
terry

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