

## Chairman's report

SVA AGM – 1 July 2021

Welcome to AGM. As everyone knows we have a constitutional requirement to hold an AGM to formally review the business of the past year and agree the annual accounts and appoint an auditor if so required. 30 days notice is required for the meeting. Thank you to all for attending.

What has happened over the last 18 months? Those who attended the recent ADMG AGM where a report on SVA activity was given will have heard what I am about to report before so I will spare a long resumé of 2020 and the effects of lockdown on our industry. These will be well known to you all. Suffice to say that as we were coming to the end of 2019 we knew from research that the retail market was growing at around 12%. I will say more about research later, but we did seek and received money from Government for this. We needed to assess the size and direction of the UK market, our biggest, and obtain consumers' views about venison as a healthy product as up to that time much of our market intelligence had been anecdotal.

But then came Covid which hit the entire food and drink industry and we saw closure of hotels, restaurants, catering, events and food service severely cut back with the result that the entire chain from hill to plate has been disrupted.

The provision of venison for public consumption is a relatively simple business but interrupt any part of the chain and there is a concertina effect with a loss of business right down that chain.

These effects are still being felt, and will be for some considerable time, but to a lesser degree as we come to terms with Covid and its hygiene, safety and social distancing requirements. But it will take time before we return to 2019 market conditions.

Over the last year we have seen a number of producers seeking other routes to market and hence a better price for their venison. Initiatives have included local processing, estate shops, mail order and click and collect endeavours.

We ran a campaign with Scottish Craft Butchers last autumn to encourage increased supply through local butchers. Improving local supply chains is an objective of the Scottish venison strategy and remains an important part of our agenda.

Now that we are out of the EU the export trade has faced difficulties. Sending carcasses to the EU incurs additional costs, red tape and bureaucracy as was expected. That is an area we will have to work on in the coming months.

Now I want to say a brief word on three matters: the promotional campaign; the continuing need for accurate information; and the Scottish venison strategy.

On the promotional campaign it was unfortunate that Covid stymied the initial kick-off of the campaign. But it did get underway through March and April and, given the difficult market situation, was on the whole successful.

Mentioning this gives me the opportunity to thank Dick for the immense amount of work he has put in to persuading the Scottish Government to provide the funding through Scotland Food & Drink. While Ministers make the decisions at the top the real work goes on, hours and hours of meetings, telephone calls, e mails, with civil servants and officials, and Scotland Food & Drink staff before any request can succeed and Dick's endeavours have been beyond praise. I must also add my thanks to SAOS and particularly Amanda Brown who has also been tireless in working on our Association's behalf through this difficult time.

Regarding information, for your Association to do its job properly and represent the venison industry's case to Government we need to know what is happening on the ground. By and large producers are good at this, but processors can be reluctant to provide this information. For example, we recently asked all registered AGHEs, 20 or so, what capacity they anticipated for the coming season and received just three replies. That isn't good enough. I must reiterate that the provision of any information of this nature stays within the Association and remains confidential. Without it we cannot do our job properly and we will all suffer as a result.

And on the venison strategy can I remind everyone that the delivery of the Government endorsed strategy remains at the heart of what we as an Association have to do, and I suggest to you all that you might find it useful to read through the booklet again.

That is all I am going to say by way of my Chairman's statement, but I intend to say a few more words at the conclusion of the AGM.

#### Final remarks

I said at the last Board meeting that I would retire at this AGM. I have had at least 15 years involvement with the administration and politics of the venison industry. I was asked by Stephen Gibbs to join the Venison Working Group shortly after its set-up which in time became the Scottish Venison Partnership. As Stephen became ill he asked me to take over as Chairman around six and a half years ago.

We have come a long way in those years, and we are not finished yet. I have hugely enjoyed every moment of my time within this industry. It has been a particular pleasure working closely with Dick – right from the start we had a good understanding of one another. We have maintained regular weekly (and sometimes daily) contact which has touched on all aspects of our business. I am exceptionally grateful to him for all the work and endeavour he puts in to take our business forward. So, look after him. He is the beating heart of our industry.

I have also enjoyed my contact with all of you. But it is now time to go. I am tempted to use Ian Botham's farewell in signing off from Sky TV's cricket commentary team "That's it then. I'm off!" but I will come to the next executive meeting hopefully to say goodbye to you all in person.

Bill Bewsher  
Chairman, Scottish Venison Association  
July 2021