

A silver fork is positioned vertically, with two pieces of cooked venison resting on its tines. The venison is a deep red color with some white fat visible. The background is a dark, textured wooden surface with vertical grain lines.

Launching “Eat More Venison”

How eating more venison can help save our forests,
and some ideas about how to make that happen

Who am I?

Chef/cook

Author / writer

Wild food advocate

Hospitality consultant

Owner of a small field sports
business

Rural commentator



Beware... the Nuance Boobytrap



Bear with me on this...

The huge amounts of expertise and knowledge in this room means almost everything I am about to say can be challenged, BUT

Detail is the enemy of action

We need to make a plan and address the food angle of the proposed increased venison cull without getting bogged down in practicalities and nuance

Hold those thoughts!



Introduction

- Why am I involved with this?
- Away day and Cannich event
- We know more venison needs to be eaten
- How do we make that happen?
- Need to build a story and engage people

Biodiversity and deer – why change is needed



There are currently more wild deer in Scotland than ever, but deer eat trees and shrubs, preventing woodland regeneration



As part of the Scottish government's biodiversity plan, far more wooded areas are needed in Scotland



To achieve this, we need to **temporarily** reduce the deer population to allow the trees to grow. Then, the deer can come back again

The opportunities



Feed local Scottish communities, and build vital rural income for remote areas by eating Scottish wild venison



Deer are harvested to allow trees to grow. It's not farmed to feed us, so it's an ethical choice. It's an environmentally-friendly protein that is low in fat and high in nutrients



Eating Scottish wild venison will:

- Protect trees
- Restore biodiversity
- Reduce carbon

The challenges



Deer are difficult to harvest because of their habitat and costly to process as it's a highly-skilled job



Scottish wild venison meat is not financially supported like farmed meat, so is more expensive to buy in the shops, if available at all



The Scottish Government's plan to restore biodiversity will fail if funding is not made available to:

- support the venison processing and harvesting industry
- promote Scottish wild venison to the consumer as the ethical, environmentally sustainable and healthy option



Some guesstimates

88295

Number of deer reported harvested in Scotland last year (down on previous) – are expectations unrealistic? (Nuance boobytrap!)

80,000

Say 10% is shot during rut and exported - leaves around 80k deer

17.5kg

Say average meat content from cross-species numbers is 35% and average carcass weight is 50kg = 17.5kg

1.4m

$17.5 \text{ kg} \times 80\text{k} = 1.4\text{million kg of meat}$

And some assumptions...



Population of people in Scotland is around 5.5m. Let's say 2m million don't eat meat, so that's 3.5m people eating 0.4kg pp, pa. Average UK meat eater consumes c.60kg meat pa (c.165g per day), so last year's cull = just 3 meals pp, pa



Let's say we doubled the harvest next year, we'd still only need people in Scotland to eat 6 meals a year containing 165g venison, or 12 containing 82.5g (very small burger/standard sausage - single quarterpounder has 113.4g of meat in it)



What's the catch? COST.

Beef, per kg – £6.50

Venison mince, per kg - £7.50 (wholesale)

Getting the word out – who and how



- First step – **market research** into types of consumer most likely to eat venison
- Working **focus groups**
- Need to raise awareness among consumers with targeted **information campaign**:
 - **Social media** – there's some game PR activity, but little venison focus
 - **Community** groups & events - underway
 - **Partnerships / sponsorships** with interested third parties:
 - Forestry & Land Scotland
 - Woodland Trust Scotland
 - Scottish Government (part of health improvement strategy to tackle obesity)
 - High-profile **brand ambassadors** (Scottish Athletics / Highland Games, Sport Scotland)
 - **Catering** outlets along busy trade routes
- A parting thought – c.3.2m visitors to Scotland each year - if they all eat a couple of venison dishes while they're here, we start running out of venison...

Some creative ideas...

- Engagement with the **food service sector** could be crucial to success – imagine getting wild Scottish venison into the meatballs at Subway, or the noodles at Wagamama's
- Hospitality sector is woefully understaffed – **creative product ideas** to help chefs would almost guarantee a surge in overall sales. Pulled venison into pub chains, venison pastrami into sandwich shops....
- Third and public sector – **schools** are an obvious choice for venison on the menu, but also **soup kitchens** and **homeless shelters**...



Shawarma shack



- I've commissioned a **large prototype rotating kebab** grill, so I can trial a venison-based meat business across a few test sites in summer 2024
- Fast food and **roadside spends** are among the most regular purchases for food made outside the supermarket – we need to target that market with a ready-to-eat offer
- Partner with game processing and venison / deer **promotional bodies** to position venison shawarma wraps as a must-do part of visiting Scotland - like Nessie spotting, or haggis hunting

Round up

- Lots of successful **venison-based business** already in Scotland, but we need to **support** it (Great Glen, Highland Charcuterie)
- Strong case for **financial support** from industry and government to drive a marketing campaign
- Options for **healthy eating** angles (get venison on the Zoe Podcast!) are huge – low fat source of guilt-free meat protein, aligns with wild food diets
- Opportunity is **now** – numbers need addressing immediately, unless cull numbers can't be reached and overpopulation continues to grow



Thanks for listening!



Questions?