



January 26, 2012

Senator accelerating deer farm regulation change **(<http://www.register-herald.com/local/x647572510/Senator-accelerating-deer-farm-regulation-change>)**

By Mannix Porterfield
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CHARLESTON — Deer farming looms as a major enterprise, if West Virginia can only put its regulations within the Department of Agriculture so home-raised venison can be sold inside the state, says Sen. Ron Miller.

Come Monday, the new chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee plans to take up a bill he offered Wednesday to remove the supervision of deer farms from the Division of Natural Resources.

And that won't come without a fight from the DNR, he acknowledged.

"There was a presentation in the interims, and I realized then there was going to be some strong opposition," Miller, D-Greenbrier, said.

Natural Resources Director Frank Jezioro maintains that his agency must retain control of the fledgling industry to protect wild deer for hunters.

Miller doesn't buy into that contention.

"I know it won't affect deer hunting," he said. "It's (deer farming) not proven to be a disease problem."

John Rose, a deer farmer in Philippi, who owns some 45 head, is among 40 or so such producers in the state, and says any health issues that might surface at them can be controlled, since the animals are behind fences, as opposed to deer running wild in the forests.

All deaths inside deer farms are tested, but the DNR only tests 0.15 percent, he said, adding in a recent interview, "You can't go out there and test all these wild animals."

One area of concern has been Chronic Wasting Disease, a transmittable, neurological disease of deer and elk. Several cases have been documented in West Virginia, confined largely to one area, but not one outbreak has been linked to a deer farm — a point the industry often cites.

Miller sees the industry as well-regulated and controlled.

"The Department of Agriculture says they can handle the farms," the senator said.

“It’s one of the things we can produce well.”

Deer production promises to be a plus for West Virginia’s agriculture business, he said, noting the industry now is forbidden to sell the venison of whitetails inside the state.

That just about limits the farms to selling genetic stock for breeding and urine for scent, he said.

“If we open up the markets, we can have a venison market for West Virginia,” he said.

“We can create a farm product for these small farms. We’ll have to change a few things in the code. With that, it could become a product. This would be a tremendous venison market.”

From a health standpoint, Miller said selling deer meat raised in West Virginia makes even more sense.

“It’s healthy,” he said.

“It’s low fat. If you cook correctly, you don’t know the difference in lean beef. Same with goat or lamb. It will be a growing industry for our farms. The key for me as agriculture chairman is to try to make West Virginia’s agriculture footprint bigger and stronger.”

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