

The Scottish Countryside Alliance represents the voice of rural Scotland with members and supporters spread across the country. Our work focuses on campaigning for the countryside on rural issues such as connectivity and communications, rural crime, field sports and land management. Our team has extensive experience in deer management and has long been recognised as a key contributor to the compiling of best practice guidance, and legislation that governs the management of deer in Scotland.

The majestic Red Deer pulls in many visitors interested in wildlife tourism, which brings in around £100,000 from tourists each year, merely seeking to watch and photograph these wild animals in their natural habitat within the Scottish countryside. Deer stalking in Scotland is also said to bring in more than £100 million annually to the economy. Therefore, it is important to understand that deer should not just be seen as a pest species in our countryside but as a contributor to the rural economy.

Before a deer is culled, there must be a market for the meat products. Venison dealers are closing, and competition is dwindling, allowing the main dealers to offer the person selling the carcasses far below market value for this organic and healthy product. This is a food source that should be celebrated and better utilised since the food miles are low and it makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, coupled with the fact we need to cull tens of thousands of deer over the coming years.

Investment in the right areas within the sector is crucial. The normalisation of the consumption of local venison will tick many boxes and will assist in reaching net zero targets. Ensuring that a market for affordable, healthy, sustainable and local Scottish venison is created and that venison is available to everyone across Scotland, surely makes more sense than deer managers being paid far below market value for deer, so much so that it doesn't even cover the costs of culling the deer in the first place. Currently, there is little or no incentive in place for the private sector to commit more time and effort in order for the Scottish Government to reach its own targets and, in any case, much of the deer that does end up in the food chain will be exported.

We ask the following of the Scottish Government:

- **Listen** to industry experts when formulating legislation surrounding deer and do not enforce unwanted or unrequired regulations.
- **Prioritise** and promote venison as a sustainable and healthy food source in our own country, creating a strong market for the future.
- **Invest** in this sector with the assistance of deer managers by formulating well-thought-out incentives or community facilities.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance stands with partner organisations in offering advice and support where required.

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