

Elk meat a tasty alternative for holiday dining

By Louise Rachlis

Citizen advertising features

They aren't named Dasher, Dancer or Rudolf, but the elk at Thom van Eeghen's Elk Ranch in Kanata on 90 acres just off March Road are ready for Christmas.

Mr. van Eeghen's happy elk are raised naturally in an organic environment; they do not require indoor housing and do well without antibiotics or hormone additives. They graze on only the best alfalfa hay and oats which makes for tasty lean meat unlike anything from the wild.

"Elk are intelligent and majestic animals to work with and observe," says Mr. van Eeghen, who began the operation in 1999, with his wife, Fay Armitage. "We raise elk for breeding stock, and recently we've diversified into sales of meat and velvet capsules."

The Elk Ranch was recently featured at Ottawa's Wine and Food Show, with Robert Bourassa, owner and chef of the Café Henry Burger, showcasing elk meat. "Elk is the superior of all meats," he says. "It is my favourite to cook with and to eat."

Elk meat is virtually fat-free, and it has a rich, robust, slightly sweet flavour that's milder and more consistent than wild game, with a texture that's melt-in-your-mouth tender, says Mr. van Eeghen. "Very



— The Elk Ranch

Elk don't require indoor housing, and graze on alfalfa hay and oats.

versatile elk is delicious with sweet or savoury sauces and seasonings ... Appealing to the health conscious consumer, elk meat is high in protein, iron, and vitamin B, and it is lower in cholesterol and leaner than beef, lamb, veal, or pork. With proper preparation elk may be substituted for these meats in most traditional recipes."

Thom and Fay have over 26 years of extensive experience in the elk industry in New Zealand and Canada. Thom is a di-

rector of the Canadian Velvet Marketing Council, a longstanding member of both New Zealand and Ontario Elk Breeders Associations and one of the founding members of the Ottawa Rural Tourism Council.

The antlers of the male elk, when used in health supplement capsules are sold primarily for improving athletic performance and strength; improving muscle recovery after exercise; reducing negative ef-

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fects of stress; enhancing sexual functioning for both men and women, and anti-inflammatory properties.

"The Asian community has been consuming it for centuries to help with low energy levels and other problems," says Mr. van Eeghen, who had an injury himself while building his home, and found the antler capsules work very well.

"Elk velvet capsules and products have an expanding market in the sports and health food supplement industry in North America and abroad," he says. "Although velvet antler capsules are widely acclaimed as an aphrodisiac, this is only one of the wide ranges of benefits associated with the use of velvet. For centuries it's been used to control blood pressure, improve muscle tone, sharpen mental alertness, and relieve the inflammation of arthritis. It is the prime remedy for promoting endurance, stamina, and strength,

combating the symptoms of stress and fatigue and for revitalizing the entire system."

For further information search the web keyword, velvet antler or see www.deervelvet.org. Thom and Fay have a large selection of cooking tips and recipes covering a broad range of ways to prepare elk meat.

To get to the Elk Ranch, 1271 Old Carp Road, take 417 exit on March Road heading North 4km. Turn left on Old Carp Road. One km, turn right at the Elk sign. Telephone (613) 599-0771, e-mail info@elkranch.com or view www.elkranch.com. Hours: Closed Sunday noon.

Mr. van Eeghen also notes that the Elk Ranch is seeking proposals from the community towards its own future development. "Our goal is to showcase this grass-roots commercial farm, and with a sense of good old down to earth learning and fun, to help us commercialize and merchandise this unique local business," he says. "If you feel your background is conducive to promoting and advancing this agri-tourism business we encourage you to contact us for an interview. Maybe we have the place to allow your experience and creativity to grow."