

Kentucky Alternative Livestock Association (KALA)

FAQ's

Entering the world of deer farming is something that takes a great deal of time, energy, money, and countless other resources; however, it can be the most rewarding, expensive, exciting, exhausting, wonderful, frustrating, and incredible experience that you can ever be a part of in life. It is not something to be entered into lightly. The amount of planning before the first deer gets to your farm should be extensive. Ultimately this will save you a great deal of time and money. It's easy to get eager to get deer on your farm, but in the long run patience and preparation will pay off.

This guide is in no way meant to be an exhaustive resource. It's simply a starting point to answer some of the most frequently asked questions. It is incredibly beneficial for you to visit a variety of farms as well. This will allow you to put a visual connection with what you read in this guide and in regulations. Though we are all bound by the same regulations, you will see that there are subtle differences in the way that each farm is operated. Deer farming is not an exact science and there isn't a textbook, tried and true method that you can study to get it all right on the first try. This isn't said to be a deterrent; it's a fact that you will likely often hear from other farmers. We encourage you to reach out to anyone within our organization at any time with questions, concerns, or general information requests. KALA believes that when you as an individual farmer are successful, it creates success for all of us within the industry.

Before getting into some frequently asked questions, there are two sets of regulations with which you need to familiarize yourself. The cervid industry in the Commonwealth is dually governed: the Department of Agriculture has oversight for the herd, while the Department of Fish and Wildlife has oversight for the fence. Building a relationship with your local Department of Agriculture inspector is important, as well as getting to know your local Department of Fish and Wildlife staff. Transparency in those relationships will ensure a mutual trust is built. You can find each department's information from these links:

<https://www.kyagr.com/statevet/farmed-cervids.html>

<https://fw.ky.gov/Wildlife/Pages/Transportation-and-Holding-of-Captive-Cervids.aspx>

Frequently Asked Questions:

How much will it cost to get started?

- This is a difficult question to answer, as it will depend greatly on the area you are fencing, initial cost and number of deer you purchase, and many other factors as well. It could be as little as \$15,000 or significantly more dependent upon those factors. Be sure to keep very accurate records of your expenditures for tax purposes.

How big should I make my pens? Where should I locate them?

- A good rule of thumb for pen size is at least a quarter of an acre. It would be best to have only a few deer in that size of pen because you don't want to wear the grass in the pens down. Half acre or larger pens do allow for more animals per pen and also allow for additional grass growth. Keeping healthy grass growth in the pens will reduce the health challenges you face. Pens should always be constructed with expansion in mind. Inevitably, once you go through your first season of deer farming, you will feel the need to expand. It is not a good idea to locate them near shallow bodies of water due to the presence of disease carrying midges or along tree lines where storms could cause trees to fall onto the fence. It is also best to keep the pens away from other livestock pens because of the risk of disease transmission due to things like flies. Keeping them away from road view will also be beneficial.

How should I lay out the structure of the pens?

- It is best to have a shelter or a wind break in each pen. This allows for relief from the elements. Though deer are very hardy, they still need a place to cool off or come in out of the rain. You also want to make sure that feeding areas are out of the elements also. Keeping water troughs in areas with good drainage will keep that area from being muddy.

How many deer should I start with?

- It is a good idea to start small. This allows you to learn the best way to care for and manage your herd while not being overwhelmed. Be mindful that herd sizes can multiply quickly during fawn season, so within your first year it would be easy to double your herd without any additional purchases. As you are thinking about what size of herd is right for you, look at your long-term goals: are you going to run only a breeding operation, or do you plan to have both a breeding and hunting operation?

How much does it cost to raise a deer?

- While there are many factors that play into this, a good average is around \$450 per head per year. There are also annual fees for licensure that must be paid to both the Department of Agriculture and Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Do I have to have a veterinarian?

- A veterinarian of record is required to be listed with your application to the Department of Agriculture. It is also best practice to maintain herd health.

Do you have to bottle feed fawns?

- This is a question in which you will likely find the most diversity in amongst deer farmers. Some farms bottle feed all fawns, others will only feed doe fawns, and then some farms will only feed those who are abandoned by their mothers. Some use a powder formula, while others use a whole milk mixture. No matter the number you bottle feed, it is an intense season that must be done on a consistent schedule. It is important to set a schedule that you can maintain during that phase. Even if you plan to bottle feed, it is best to leave the fawns with their mothers for the first 24 hours of life. This allows for them to get the natural colostrum that is produced in the mother's milk right after birth. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian or another farmer if you have concerns or want further recommendations about the feeding program that is best for your farm.

What kind of breeding is best?

- Breeding can be done conventionally, or what is called live breeding, or it can be done through artificial insemination (AI). While conventional breeding is more cost effective if you have a breeder buck, there are positives to AI as well. It allows for farmers to time the birth of fawns more specifically and have a greater variety in semen options for specific characteristics for which you would like to breed. This, like so many other things in deer farming, is a personal choice that must be made based upon your unique circumstances.

How do I tag deer?

- Per regulations, all cervids in the Commonwealth must have two forms of identification. One is the flop tag, or sometimes called the farm tag. It is the same kind of tag that you would see in cattle. This can be numbered in any way that you decide. The other form of identification is a state tag. Per regulations, this must be an RFID tag. It is a small tag that has a unique identifier number on it that is tied directly to your farm. It is the main way that the Department of Agriculture tracks the deer census on your farm and their movements to any other farms to which you might sell. Be sure to consult regulations about the time frames by which deer should be tagged.

Do I need to have a handling facility or barn?

- It is best if you have some sort of indoor facility to be able to hold deer should they become ill or if you are bottle feeding. This area should be temperate and secure so that it does not cause further issues of health concerns or harm to the deer as they grow and/or heal. If you don't have a facility, state regulations require you to have a

What kinds of medications do I need?

- Having some basic medications on hand is a good idea. Attached you will find a list of frequently used medications and their purposes. Always be sure to consult your veterinarian before administering any medications.

If I have a deer that dies, what do I need to do?

- Per regulations, you must notify the Department of Agriculture (both the person in Frankfort who maintains the census record and your local inspector) by filling out a deceased animal report card. This notification should ideally be made within 24 hours of the death but must be made within seven days. You must also submit the brain stem and lymph nodes of the deceased deer to one of the state laboratories for testing. This must be done within seven days of the death. Your veterinarian can assist you in removing these, or you may receive training from the Department of Agriculture on how to remove them properly.

What is required for me to move a deer from my farm to another farm?

- Per regulations, prior to the move, your veterinarian must complete and sign a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI). This must be submitted to the Department of Agriculture and they must be notified of the move. Department of Agriculture staff or their designee must be on hand when the deer get loaded into the trailer at the originating location and must be on hand when they are off loaded at their new location. Be sure that you are allotting enough time for receiving approval to move prior to scheduling the move.

What kinds of supplies should I have on hand?

- There are several items that are recommended for you to have on hand as you begin your career in deer farming. As Murphy's Law says, if you don't have it, you will need it. Keeping that in mind, it is better to have it and rarely need it than to be in the middle of a crisis and not have the things you need at arm's length. These items include a dart gun for tranquilizing deer for movement or to treat illness, previously listed medications, gloves, thermometer, hair cutting shears, a 10% bleach spray solution for disinfecting surfaces including shoes if you have visited other farms (this reduces disease spread), and copies of forms that are required for reporting (found through the Department of Agriculture link or by calling their office).

What kind of vaccination/worming program do I need to have?

- Deworming can occur annually by adding deworming pellets to feed. Vaccinations can start as early as 12 hours after birth. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian about what type of program is best for your farm.

Again, feel free to contact any member of KALA with additional questions you may have. We strive to support one another and provide education about the cervid industry through our own learned experience coupled with the evidenced based practices of the professionals with whom we surround ourselves. It is through this that we all are successful.



KENTUCKY ALTERNATIVE LIVESTOCK ASSOCIATION