

COMMODITY

GAME FARMS

Description

Game farming in British Columbia is defined as the agricultural production of the wildlife species fallow deer, bison and reindeer. The farming of game animals is strictly controlled through legislative requirements. Under the *Game Farm Act*, producers require a Game Farm License to operate. Both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment administer legislation to minimize the risks of disease transference to wildlife and domestic livestock, to minimize genetic contamination and illegal trade of wildlife, and to foster the industry's development.

Game farm livestock, raised as breeding stock or as meat products, are raised entirely on deeded land, not on Crown land. The offspring generated during a one year cycle may be overwintered with the breeding herd and sold the following year. Male fallow deer antlers are usually removed and sold for their velvet.

Game farm producers need access to water for livestock watering and irrigation. They use a variety of farm equipment such as trucks, tractors, cultivators, harvesters and sprayers. On-site infrastructure may include irrigation systems, livestock watering systems, barns, corrals and handling systems, storage sheds and fences. Producers may use pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer on the crops they grow.

Farm Practices of Particular Interest

Some of the farm practices common to game farming are legislated under the *Game Farm Act* and include standards specified within the Game Farm License. Further details are identified in the *British Columbia Game Farm Manual*. Practices for specific farm activities can be found in the Farm Practice section of this reference guide. Farm practices that are of particular interest to game farming include the following.

Animal Care and Handling

On-farm enclosures for game farm livestock are required to prevent escapes, to protect wildlife from the possible spread of disease, and to ensure that game animals do not become established outside the farm premises. The game farm license requirements include specifications for perimeter fence designs and suggest appropriate construction methods for facilities in which animals can be individually and humanely handled for inspection and treatment.

Specific requirements also apply to game at large, including reporting and recapture conditions prior to the animals reverting to the ownership of the Crown in right of the Province. Game at large can be destroyed if they pose a danger to the public or native wildlife.

All game must possess an approved identification system such as a tamperproof curl lock ear tag as is common for fallow deer and reindeer or a registered brand as is usual for bison. Specific reporting requirements are established for inventory control and each licensee must keep records available and current.

Licensees must ensure that dehorning, antler removal, castration and other game animal handling and husbandry procedures are conducted in a humane manner by experienced individuals using proper equipment and accepted techniques. Velveting of deer must not be conducted without a nerve-blocking agent of a type, dosage, and in a manner recommended by a practicing member of the British Columbia Veterinary Medical Association.

See also Farm Practice: [Animal Care and Handling Transportation](#)

Mortalities

Game mortalities must be disposed of in an accepted manner. Good practices vary, depending on the cause of death, local climate and surrounding land use. A licensee must take all necessary steps to prevent game farm animals from coming into contact with wild ungulates by regular inspection and maintenance of fences and facilities and immediately removing and disposing of mortalities. Bison mortalities that exceed a specified level (for example, 5% of the herd in a six-month period) must undergo postmortems conducted by a veterinarian on all subsequent mortalities.

See also Farm Practice: [Mortality Disposal](#)

Transportation

All transport vehicles must be installed with locking mechanisms on their boxes or containers to prevent accidental opening. In addition, deer must be segregated by sex and must have their antlers removed during shipping.

See also Farm Practice: [Transportation](#)

Principal and Accessory Buildings

From an operational perspective, principal farm buildings on game farms are usually minimal in scope and number. Fences contain the game in large grazing areas in which shelters may be found in long grasses or among trees. Accessory farm buildings may include storages for agricultural wastes, chemicals, compost input materials, compost products, hay, grain, wood waste and silage. Silage can be stored in towers, horizontal concrete or wood bunkers and in plastic bags. Other accessory structures could include confined livestock areas, machine sheds, on-farm composting buildings or processing facilities. From a watercourse protection perspective, however, the definition of principal and accessory buildings may differ. For the purposes of determining applicable setbacks from watercourses and property lines, therefore, local government bylaws or the *Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas* should be consulted. Building assessments may need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis if the designation of a building as principal or accessory is unclear.

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that the farm operation must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act* and the

regulations under those Acts. Information on federal and provincial legislation can be found in Appendices B and C.

Acts that pertain to specific farm activities are listed in the Farm Practices section of this reference guide. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices. Acts that are not referenced elsewhere and which may be of special interest to game farm producers include the following.

Federal Legislation

The *Health of Animals Act* is in place for the protection of animals and provides stipulations concerning diseases and toxic substances that may affect animals or be transmitted by animals to people.

Provincial Legislation

The *Animal Disease Control Act* provides statutory authority to limit the spread of contagious diseases.

The *Game Farm Act* allows specific types of game to be raised for agricultural purposes whereas the *Game Farm Regulation* establishes production and operation criteria.

The *Wildlife Act* provides for regulation and management of fish and wildlife resources.

The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* protects all animals (other than wild animals not in captivity) from distress during handling or any activities not considered to fall under generally-accepted animal management practices.

Local Government Legislation

Applicable local government legislation may include animal control bylaws and meat inspection bylaws.

Publications

Publications that provide information on game farming include, but are not limited to, the following. Refer to Appendix D for details.

British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Reference Guide

British Columbia Game Farm Manual

Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Farmed Deer (Cervidae)