



February (Summer) 2011, 1 page

MARIKA MCKINNON

By Marika McKinnon

I have been in deer farming for 15 years, while Andrew has more than 21 years experience farming deer. My love for deer started many years ago when I was in Yugoslavia. I remember certain family members arriving home at 4am with fresh venison stuffed in the boot of a car . . . Of course it was legal!!! My Dad was also a great fan of antlers, trophies, etc., so I grew up with a great admiration for this magnificent animal.

Our 800 acre farm is in South Western Victoria, 4km from the South Australian border, near Mount Gambier. We run approximately 470 stags for velveting and around 330 breeding hinds, plus yearlings. Velvet is our main enterprise and the culls are sold for venison. Most of the physical deer work is done by the two of us, although Emily, our 12 year old daughter is starting to fight me for the velveting assistant's job. James and William, our 10 year old twins, are also just starting to get keen to help with deer work. They are a good size in order to compare and measure large sticks of velvet.

We also run a small handful of cows, around 600 breeding ewes and the usual (and not so usual) "freezer" animals, such as pigs, chooks, quail, pheasants, partridges and of course a pear tree!

A couple of years ago, we were partners in a butcher shop in Mount Gambier. This gave us an amazing insight into the meat industry. It also taught us about processing meat, the education of customers and the persistence required in selling non-mainstream meats such as venison. An important lesson we learned was that once successfully "educated" about venison, consistency and continuity is the next important issue for customers. Not always an easy thing to tackle when dealing with abattoirs that are not experienced in deer slaughter.

In my spare time (?) I enjoy painting deer buttons and experimenting with making things from antlers.

I look forward to my role as the next DIAA secretary/treasurer and hope that I can do justice to the position I am being entrusted with.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Solange for her many years of dedication and hard work as secretary/treasurer of the DIAA. I wish her all the best for the future. Keep your phone lines free for me Solange!

