# Cairngorms initiative aims to tackle deer overpopulation and support local communities



A new initiative launched by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) in collaboration with farmers from Perthshire is designed to address the complex issues associated with deer population management while also benefiting local communities. The project is aimed at mitigating the negative impact of deer on agricultural land and fragile ecosystems, while simultaneously providing a sustainable source of food for local food banks and schools through regular donations of venison.

The initiative is a component of the Cairngorms 2030 programme, with funding provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is anticipated that this project will create a local market for venison that reduces food miles and generate training opportunities and rural employment.

In comments made to The Courier, CNPA convener Sandy Bremner expressed enthusiasm for the project, stating, “This is an exciting project that will help farmers tackle a long-running problem, support the wider community and preserve fragile habitats. There’s great potential for it to be rolled out further. We are already looking at other areas that would benefit.”

The hands-on management of the project is being conducted by Mike Cottam, a land management adviser for CNPA. He described the initiative as a "truly collaborative approach to solving rural challenges" and emphasised its thoughtful consideration of the participants’ needs and skills.

Currently, two farms are participating in this project: Glenkilrie Farm, located near Blairgowrie, and Knockbarry Farm, situated near Pitlochry. Both farms have received grants to establish "larders," specifically designed for processing deer culled from the national park vicinity. A significant portion of the processed venison, which includes items such as mince, meatballs, burgers, and sausages, will be donated to food banks, schools, and community kitchens. The farms will also sell some of the venison to local retail outlets and hospitality establishments to ensure that the project is financially viable.

Helen Stewart, the owner of Knockbarry Farm, has seen a significant deer population on her 5,000-acre farm, possessing approximately 650 deer, a number she noted is about five times what is considered sustainable. This overpopulation has led to substantial agricultural damage, affecting both pastures intended for sheep and the structural integrity of farm boundaries. Stewart has developed a social enterprise known as Fair Feast that has already provided over a quarter of a tonne of venison to local charities and is aiming to deliver four tonnes each year. She explained, “We experienced agricultural damage from an extremely high deer density. We wanted to find an ethical and sustainable way to reduce deer numbers.”

Meanwhile, Glenkilrie Farm has been operated by the Houstoun family for 67 years. Co-owner Lauren Houstoun highlighted the increased perception of deer as pests due to the rising population and the subsequent agricultural damage. She noted, “We are thrilled to be able to put a positive spin on the situation and show what a valuable commodity the deer really are.”

Both farms are adopting a proactive approach to integrating venison into local school initiatives. Glenkilrie Farm plans to donate venison for use in home economics classes and hopes to include it in school menus. “We are passionate in our efforts to make sure children know where their food comes from,” said Houstoun in her remarks to The Courier.

The National Lottery funding has enabled the establishment of advanced "superlarders," which allow for efficient processing of deer. These facilities improve financial returns, permitting farmers like Stewart and the Houstoun family to employ butchers and manage culling more sustainably while fulfilling their charitable objectives. The project is seen as replicable across other regions in the Highlands, according to Cottam, who remains optimistic about securing further funding to scale up the initiative.

In summary, this project represents a multifaceted approach to address the ecological concerns posed by deer populations, whilst simultaneously providing nutritional support to vulnerable community members, thus fostering a more interconnected approach to land management and community welfare in rural Scotland.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/national-park-partnership-plan/conservation/priority-2-deer-management/> - This URL supports the claim about the Cairngorms National Park Authority's ongoing efforts to manage deer populations sustainably, aligning with the initiative's goals of reducing deer impacts on habitats.
* <https://www.ldns.org.uk/naturescot-deer-cull-incentive-schemes-to-help-tackle-nature-and-climate-crises/> - This URL provides context on deer management incentive schemes in Scotland, which are relevant to the broader context of managing deer populations and their environmental impacts.
* <https://upperdeesidedonsidedmg.deer-management.co.uk/deer-management-success-in-the-cairngorms/> - This URL highlights successful collaborative deer management efforts in the Cairngorms, demonstrating how such approaches can benefit both conservation and local communities.
* <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/> - This URL is related to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which is mentioned as a source of funding for the initiative, supporting projects that benefit local communities and environments.
* <https://www.cairngorms.co.uk/> - This URL provides general information about the Cairngorms National Park, including its conservation efforts and community engagement, which are relevant to the initiative's context.
* <https://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/deer-management> - This URL offers insights into Scotland's broader deer management policies and strategies, which are crucial for understanding the initiative's place within national conservation efforts.