



# Quality assured wild venison set to hit dinner plates

**The first British Quality Wild Venison accreditation achieved by Forestry England, Highland Game and Ben Rigby Game.**

The [British Quality Wild Venison standard](#) (BQWV), launched in 2023, is the first quality assurance scheme for wild venison produced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Forestry England has become the first producer of wild venison to receive accreditation for 11 larders, entered into the scheme with venison from the nation's forests. Earlier this year, the first processor, Highland Game, and recently Ben Rigby Game, both achieved BQWV certification, meaning there is now a complete route to market for accredited wild venison. Other wild venison processors are currently awaiting audit.

## **The British Quality Wild Venison standard**

Developed by a cross-sector working group, the British Quality Wild Venison standard aims to increase the traceability of wild venison, increase buyer confidence, and support woodland management. Accreditation involves a rigorous assessment of policy, procedure, and infrastructure by independent auditors Intertek SAI Global. Applicants seeking accreditation need to demonstrate proper handling of deer carcasses, have their premises registered as food businesses with the local authority, and adhere to the required standards for food production as outlined in regulations and best practices, to guarantee full traceability.

## **The Wild Venison Market**

Venison is the product of deer management, which is essential to protect our woodlands and open landscapes. It is a nutritious, healthy meat, high in essential amino acids and a rich source of thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, iron, and zinc. It is lower in cholesterol and saturated fats than other red meats and is a source of high-quality protein. Wild venison is also a truly free-range meat, which supports consumer demands for free range, high welfare and sustainably produced food.

The wild venison market has always fluctuated, and last winter saw several game dealers reducing their prices or even closing their doors to producers as supply outstripped demand. This can present challenges for landowners who are trying to manage deer numbers sustainably. It is essential that we develop a large-scale year-round demand for British wild venison to protect our natural landscapes from the damage done by high-density populations of wild deer.

BQWV aims to develop new markets for venison from the nation's forests through the public sector, contract catering, food banks and food retailers. Consumer surveys suggest that low confidence in the product and a lack of accessibility continue to limit demand. The new independently audited standard aims to help overcome this barrier, ensuring that more people enjoy this delicious, sustainable and truly wild meat.

Christian Nissen, Managing Director, Highland Game Ltd, said:

*"This is a vital step, so consumers have confidence in the venison supply chain journey and know that they are eating quality venison. From a business perspective, it supports efficiency and margins and delivers superior venison quality. With this standard we are better placed to compete against other farmed proteins as buyers are re-assured that the quality we supply is the very best."*

Jim Lee, Forestry England Wildlife Manager, said:

*"Achieving this standard is testament to the hard work and professionalism of Forestry England's wildlife teams. BQWV certification will ensure that our standards continue to be the very best that they can be and help more people enjoy a delicious, sustainable, and truly wild food source from the nation's forests. Controlling deer, whose population is believed to be at its highest level for 1,000 years, continues to be a vital part of our work to ensure forests and woodlands thrive."*

Ben Rigby, Managing Director, Ben Rigby Game Ltd, said:

*"Ben Rigby Game is delighted to be working in partnership with the British Quality Wild Venison Standard."*

*As a leader in top-quality British venison, we ensure that standards are surpassed to create customer confidence and continual growth within the industry.*

*We would strongly recommend that more suppliers follow suit and sign up to the BQWV Standard guaranteeing an unbeatable and sustainable product in a strong and expanding market into the future.*

*We are immensely proud that the only thing you will read in small print on our packaging is 100% BRITISH."*

**ENDS**

## Notes to Editors

### Highland Game Ltd

Since it was founded in 1997, [Highland Game](#) has meticulously focused on driving up quality standards of Wild British Venison with an ambition to drive the protein into new markets and widen the availability and appeal of Venison across the UK.

Our competitive edge is guided by our standards and protocol, be that BRC AA, SQWV, Food For Life and now BQWV accreditation.

As the profile of Venison continues to grow, Highland Game Quality Approved Venison is on an exciting journey to grow its current markets and widen its appeal into new ones. This is further epitomised by the nature of our offer, an ethically sourced and healthy protein that furthermore is harvested from lead free shot and offers a significantly lower carbon meat, that is naturally free from additives.

At Highland Game our obsession is to partner with our customers to continue driving Venison sales at scale. (Examples of this can be found in corporate and events businesses). We know there is a greater need than ever to promote and sell Wild British Venison as more availability beckons with the harvest for wild deer needing to be ramped up to protect their own welfare and manage biodiversity, tree planting and land management better.

On this path we continue to forge new routes to market in both public and private sectors.

For more information on Highland Game visit [www.highlandgame.com](http://www.highlandgame.com).



## Forestry England

Forestry England manages and cares for the nation's 1,500 woods and forests, with over 285 million visits per year in 2023/24. As England's largest land manager, we shape landscapes and enhance forests for people to enjoy, wildlife to flourish and businesses to grow. We are continuing the work we have already started to make the nation's forests resilient to climate change and by 2026 we will:

- create at least 6,000 more hectares where we integrate wilding activities in our productive forests.
- increase the diversity of visitors to the nation's forests and have one million hours of high-quality volunteer time given to the nation's forests.
- plant at least 2,000 hectares of new, high quality, predominantly broadleaf woodlands

We manage deer populations to look after the forests in our care sustainably and we supply wild venison to our partner game dealers. For information on how we manage deer in the nation's forests visit our [website page](#).

For more information visit [forestryengland.uk](https://forestryengland.uk). Forestry England is an agency of the Forestry Commission.

## Ben Rigby Game Ltd

For more information on Ben Rigby Game visit [www.benrigbygame.co.uk](http://www.benrigbygame.co.uk).



## **Media contacts:**

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## **Interesting Facts**

- 4,000 hectares (about 4%) of woodland with SSSI status is currently in 'unfavourable' condition due to deer impacts. Impacts in the wider landscape and timescales for recovery are unknown.
- Deer cost the economy of eastern England between £7 million and in excess of £10 million per year
- High deer densities are associated with the population declines of several species of woodland bird.
- 30-50% reduction in the value of timber crops due to deer browsing.
- 70,000 deer- vehicle collisions (DVCs) in the UK annually, with around 20 human fatalities and between 400 and 1000 serious human injuries.