

## **E-L-K Spells Relief For Minnesota's Canine Arthritis Sufferers—And People Too**

With over 170,000 of the state's estimated 680,000 domestic dogs suffering from joint problems and arthritis, concerned pet owners in increasing numbers are finding new relief from a very old source: velvet antler humanely harvested from farm-raised Minnesota elk. Velvet antler is one of the state's unsung natural resources, providing nutritional support for dogs of all types ailing from osteoarthritis and joint stiffness.

"God did a wonderful job of creating elk for its many healthgiving properties," says twelve-year elk farming veteran Eleanor Neubert of Indian Hills farm near Sauk Center. "I think that the velvet antler has huge potential," she adds. "We've had friends give it to their pets for vitality because it helps fight stiffness." Eleanor reports that she's been taking velvet antler herself for about twelve years ever since she suffered a broken leg. "The doctors told me I'd get my cast off in three months," she says, "but after two months, the leg was healed and the cast came off." She attributes her speedy recovery to velvet antler. Husband Fred takes velvet antler capsules to treat his own aches pains from working on the farm.

"Velvet antler can be harvested every year throughout the productive lifetime of the elk in a process that does no harm to the animal," says Brenda Hartkopf of the Minnesota Elk Breeders Association (MnEBA). If the antlers are not harvested, they fall off naturally in March or April as new growth begins again. "Harvesting velvet from elk is similar to selling milk from cows and eggs from chickens," adds Neubert. Early removal of the antler results in an all-natural, nutrient-rich dietary supplement that improves the physical health of "Fido" and the mental health of the owner. "Pet owners don't like to see their pets suffer," says Hartkopf, "so relieving arthritis pain in dogs relieves pain for owners, too."

The ability of velvet antler to support and restore joint structure and function in humans has been substantiated by scientific evidence in compliance with FDA regulations. "A lot of our customers take it for general joint support," says Neubert, "and people say they notice a difference when they stop taking it. Recently we've had really good success selling it to people with diabetes. It seems to relax the blood vessels and improve circulation to the extremities."

Dr. Maxim Moureau and his colleagues at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Montreal recently published the results of a study on the effectiveness of velvet antler and dogs with osteoarthritis. The researchers concluded that administration of velvet antler was effective in alleviating the condition in arthritic dogs (*Canadian Veterinary Journal*, Volume 45: 133-139). The laboratory studies suggest that the essential nutrients of velvet antler have anti-inflammatory properties that fight the effects of arthritis, showing that velvet antler nutrients such as chondroitin sulfate and collagen support the restoration of joint structure and function. The greatest improvements in dogs taking velvet antler are higher energy levels, increased endurance and pain reduction.

Elk velvet is harvested for local consumption as well as export. "MnEBA has established relations with key importers into Asia, establishing a direct line to global markets," Hartkopf adds. Velvet antler has been used for over 2,000 years throughout Asia as a fundamental ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine.

In March of 2004, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health reported 313 elk farms registered throughout the state raising over 12,500 elk. It is estimated that over 60% of elk operations in the state raise the livestock for velvet producing over 20,000 pounds of velvet antler each year. Elk are part of the deer family and are grown for their meat and hides as well as for their velvet.

For more information about America's Greatest Animal, contact the Minnesota Elk Breeder's Association at [info@mneba.org](mailto:info@mneba.org) or <http://www.mneba.org>.