

## **It's a Bull Market for Minnesota-Grown Trophies**

Elk is one of the most highly prized trophies in the U.S., and Minnesota has a reputation for excellence as a source of the best elk for hunting preserves around the country. It's all in the genes. Elk thrive in Minnesota's climate, and because of their adaptation can be bred here for greater genetic superiority and growth than in most other regions.

According to Brenda Hartkopf of the Minnesota Elk Breeders Association, Minnesota elk are the envy of the thirty-nine states that allow preserves. "They love Minnesota elk for their size, their antlers, and the excellent genetic quality of our animals," she says. Years of selective breeding have produced magnificent trophy bulls that would not be found in the wild.

Each year, hunters spend several million dollars throughout the US and Canada in search of trophy elk. According to recent numbers, elk hunts may bring anywhere from \$3,000 to \$25,000 and more, depending on the type of hunt and size of elk. Elk preserves are growing in demand throughout the country as more hunters seek an authentic experience but can't travel to wilderness destinations. Demand for hunting preserves has also increased because trophy quality of wild elk has decreased. With a \$70 million elk industry already strong in the state, Minnesota has the foundation to meet increasing demand for large trophy bulls.

Elk trophy ranches offer several advantages over wilderness hunts—greater safety for hunters probably being number one. By having more control and awareness of hunters on private preserves, owners say the likelihood of accidents falls dramatically. And as the desire to hunt grows, the time to do it in may not. Preserves also help meet demand by cutting hunters' travel times to remote or distant destinations.

"Hunters who would be physically challenged by a wilderness environment go out to enjoy the hunt and several days in the outdoors," says Brenda Hartkopf. "Preserve hunting can give persons with restricted mobility the chance to enjoy an experience that would be closed to them in the wild."

Elk farming strengthens and diversifies Minnesota farming income by providing sources of revenue that don't compete with cattle or other livestock. Elk farming and hunting operations occupy vast territory, sustaining rural areas that have little value for farming. The environmentally friendly breed is able to thrive on marginal lands while leaving it in forage, pasture, and woodland. Before bulls mature into trophy stock, they annually grow and shed a rack of antlers that is also an important source of revenue through the production of velvet antler, an effective supplement for the treatment of arthritis.

It's relatively inexpensive to participate in the elk business. Elk cost 66% less to maintain than cattle, primarily from much lower feed and care expenditures.

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