

# Good enough to eat!

By JOHN FROEHLING  
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Kevin Williams of Canton was hunting in Colorado one time and shot an elk. When he ate it, he loved the taste.

He made sure he'd have more. He's been raising elk in Fulton County more than 20 years and has 100 head of elk on his farm near Breeds.

Williams, 55, said the first heifer for his elk farm came from Iowa. He bought a bull elk in Illinois and added two more heifers. "That's how we got started - three heifers and a bull," Williams said.

"At one time they had elk at Wilder Farms, the largest herd east of the Mississippi River in 1994-1995. There were over 400 head. I

owned that herd - for conservation," he said. The thousands of acres of Wilder Farms off Routes 78/24 are where Emuquon is now.

## Tastiness

Some say elk meat tastes like a cross between deer and beef. Williams says elk tastes like elk; it has to be tried to be understood or appreciated. Catfish and salmon are both fish, but salmon certainly doesn't taste like catfish, he said.

Williams said he got the name for his Canton restaurant, "Big Racks Steakhouse," from the elk. He said he doesn't sell elk at the restaurant because he couldn't keep pace with demand. His herd would be gone in a month if he tried that.

But frozen elk can be found at meat mar-

kets and locker plants approved by a state health inspector.

A few locker plants in central Illinois process elk along with other livestock, Williams said.

## Good livestock choice

Williams said reasons to raise elk include ease of handling, the fact that they are very hardy, and they also are very profitable.

In addition to being tasty, the meat is lean and healthy to eat. They also are beautiful animals, he said.

He said his elk are starting to have calves now and will do so for 90 days, or until about May 10.

They reach a weight of 600 to 700 pounds when fully grown, but they are relatively

tame. He has an 8-foot-high fence and several sets of gates, but the elk never bother the fences or try to get out, he said.

Williams feeds them with buckets of oats and other food rich in protein, and treats them gently.

Elk can be harvested any time after they're 2 years old, Williams said. He said he usually chooses elk that are 2 to 4 years old to harvest. They are mature at age 6 but can live 20 years or more.

He doesn't think of them as pets, but he said he will never kill an unusual white bull and old cow that's "the queen of the herd." Williams calls to her at feeding time, and the others follow her lead.

"But we'll eat and butcher others. We're carnivores. Animals are harvested so we can



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