

Specially Formulated Feeds Keep Reindeer And Muskox Herds Healthy

University of Alaska Fairbanks



Alaska's large-animal herds are an increasingly important part of its overall economy. Because the nutritional value of pasture grasses varies with the seasons, reindeer and muskox are susceptible to nutritional deficiencies that can lead to compromised immune systems and intestinal problems.

To counter this problem, researchers at the University of Alaska Fairbanks developed cost-effective, well-balanced feed rations for these unusual animals. In the late 1990s nutritional physiologist Perry Barboza and Dr. John Blake, D.V.M., attending veterinarian at University of Alaska Fairbanks, developed and tested three specialized feed products: 1) M Ration, a pelleted feed supplement for muskox, 2) C Ration, a complete diet for muskox calves, and 3) D Ration, a complete feed for reindeer and caribou.

The research was conducted at the Large Animal Research Station at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and funded by Alaska Science and Technology Foundation. Professor John Blake feeding a muskox food supplements that he and his team developed at the University of Alaska.

“ *The new feeds have improved the health of the university’s captive reindeer and muskox herds and reduced the risk of life-threatening intestinal disease in muskox calves.*

The feeding standards developed from this research strengthen established husbandry techniques for reindeer and muskox, and facilitate the production of qiviut, a super-fine underwool that is prized for its beauty, texture and warmth. The sale of raw qiviut fiber, processed yarn, and finished clothing from captive muskox provides sustainable income for rural Alaskans.

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