

# Cervena® Venison—an All Natural Meat for All Seasons

Cervena, the farm-raised venison from New Zealand, has been favored for years by chefs across the country because of its distinctive, mild, red meat flavor and the consistent high quality of the product.

by GERALYN DELANEY  
GRAHAM

Mark Shadbolt, a fifth-generation farmer, owns and operates Barrys Bay Estate, raising about 1,000 deer a year.



**C**hef Brad Farmerie, whose menu at Public restaurant in New York City features the product year round, chooses it for its unique flavor profile that appeals to a wide variety of his guests. “Cervena’s purity of flavor makes it a favorite choice for me. It has a taste that most beef cannot match, with a subtlety that so many of my guests enjoy.”

## What makes venison Cervena® Venison?

**I**n order to qualify for the Cervena label, the deer must be raised to specific standards. First, they must be grass fed, which helps give their meat its signature tenderness and mild flavor. The animals are raised on the open ranch lands of New Zealand, roaming freely on fields stretching over hundreds of acres, never in feedlots or confined spaces. In addition, they must be raised naturally without steroids or antibiotics. Finally, to ensure consistent flavor and

quality, only deer three years and under are eligible for the Cervena label, and only the saddle and leg cuts are used.

New Zealand is recognized as having some of the highest meat inspection standards in the world as well as being a leader in the field of sustainable land management. These animal and land management practices are what initially attracted Chef Todd Gray of Equinox restaurant in Washington, DC, to Cervena venison. “I was introduced to Cervena when I visited New Zealand over fifteen years ago. I saw first hand the farming methods—the care and attention these animals receive is what makes the meat so immaculate. It made me realize the importance of humane care and handling to achieve the most flavorful product available.”

Cervena is a “quality standard” awarded to companies that meet the requirements of this distinctive label. There are currently five companies in New Zealand that qualify to market their own brand of Cervena. Like

the Neiman Ranch products raised here in the US, the Cervena-labeled products are produced by independent farmers who appreciate and practice the high standards that go into a making a premium product. Of the 3500 deer farms in New Zealand, about 1500 of them raise deer for the Cervena appellation. They range in size from smaller family-farmed properties to larger ranches covering both the North and South Islands.

**Mark Shadbolt**, a fifth-generation farmer, owns and operates Barrys Bay Estate, a 2,000-acre farm that runs from sea level to steep hill country that overlooks Akaroa Harbor near the South Pacific Ocean. Along with his wife, he raises about 1,000 deer annually for the Cervena label. “I find deer farming very rewarding. I admire the deer and they fit so well with the natural environment here, having almost no impact on the land. And I’m proud to raise a product that is both good to eat and good for you, a product that is admired by chefs around the globe.”



Deer must be grass fed on open ranch lands to earn the Cervena label.



Chef Todd Gray

### A Meat for All Seasons with Versatile Cuts and Global Flavors

Venison in summer? Traditionally served during the cold weather, during and after hunting season, the meat from wild deer was often paired with rich savory sauces to balance its gamey flavor. But recently, chefs at fine dining establishments across the country have been serving farm-raised venison like Cervena year round. Chefs cite its mild red meat taste and its healthy low-fat profile (venison is packed with iron and calcium, but weighs in with about a fifth the amount of fat that beef does) as an excellent alternative to other red meats.

At San Francisco's Bacar restaurant, **Chef Robbie Lewis** serves Cervena venison because of its incredible versatility and the feedback he gets from his guests. "The guests relish its delicate flavor and fork tenderness; and when they find out about its low fat content, they are thrilled. And I appreciate its incredible versatility. Cervena venison offers me a wide breadth of preparation



Chef Robbie Lewis

options due to the various cuts available and the global array of flavors that complement the flavor of the meat."

**Chef Chris Shepherd** agrees. At Catalan Food and Wine in Houston, he regularly serves Cervena as a special addition to his menu, changing the preparation to fit his creative mood and the season. "Here in Texas people like to eat meat, and I like working with Cervena because it has a clean taste that's easy to pair with a wide variety of flavors. I use the Denver Leg cut because you can do anything with it – sear it and serve it sliced, make sausages out of it, serve it chicken-fried style. During the heat of the summer, I favor really light preparations like a salad with seared Cervena and candied radishes to add a nice peppery flavor."

Although a small amount of Cervena comes to the US frozen, the majority is vacuum packed and "quick chilled." The meat arrives cleaned and pre-butchered, ensuring a high yield of meat per pound of product. There a wide variety of cuts available from either the saddle, which includes the popular loin and rack

cuts, or the more economical Denver Leg, which consists of seven or eight cuts from the hind leg.

Chef Todd Gray appreciates the convenience and value that the Denver Leg offers. "It's the value piece of meat. I can get the same great results in flavor, tenderness and mouth feel that the loin and rack offer, at about half the food cost. And the variety of cuts in the leg makes it really versatile." He enjoys treating the leg cuts as mini chateaubriand, roasting them, then resting and slicing them. "Right now at Equinox I'm serving a Cervena over dirty wild rice with fava beans and roasted corn, finished with a dried white fig jus. But as the weather gets warmer, I'll want more of that summer feel of backyard barbecuing, so I'll grill up Cervena chops and rib racks, season them with a spice blend of cumin and paprika, and pair it with a spicy arugula and heirloom tomato salad. Simple, light, and delicious."

Due to its low fat content, Cervena should be cooked quickly, notes Chef Farmerie. "The lean richness of Cervena takes well to quick cooking techniques, like grilling or stir frying. It also transcends geography, working equally well in Southwest chili, an Indian curry, and Italian carpaccio." At Public's sister wine bar, The Monday Room, Farmerie house smokes Cervena with Chinese black tea and rice and serves it carpaccio style with licorice pickled onions. "It's an elegant flavor and presentation, and the dish pairs well with a wide variety of wines from pinot noir to shiraz."

For additional information, visit [www.cervena.com](http://www.cervena.com).

### Cooking Tips from the Experts

- Always pre-heat the cooking surface. Cervena should be cooked fast over high heat due to its low fat content. Brush or spray the grill or pan with oil before cooking; the added fat helps prevent sticking and drying out.
- Cervena is naturally tender, so it doesn't require marinating; it benefits from having its delicate flavors enhanced with seasonings like spice rubs as opposed to acidic marinades.
- Cervena should be served medium rare to medium for optimum flavor and texture.
- Because of its high protein and low fat levels, Cervena will continue to cook for a while after it is removed from the heat. Allow the meat to rest for 5 to 10 minutes before cutting and serving.



**VENISON ROAST WITH FAVA BEAN-CHEVRE PUREE, RADISH SALAD  
AND CELERY LEAF SALSA VERDE**  
(Serves 6)

- 1 piece each top round and bottom round Cervena venison, from The Denver Leg cut
- Salt and pepper
- 2 cups fava beans, blanched and shucked
- 1 cup fresh goat cheese
- 1/2 cup crème fraiche
- 3 cups extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 whole shallot, peeled and finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely diced
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 2 anchovy filets
- 1 bunch of parsley
- 1/2 bunch each of chervil, basil, mint, and rosemary, leaves only
- 2 lemons, zested and juiced
- 1 head of celery, stalks separated and washed
- 1 dozen French radishes
- 2 bunches watercress

Bring meat to room temperature. Season well with salt and pepper. Cover and let sit for 1 hour.

**Fava bean-goat cheese puree**

Place fava beans, goat cheese, crème fraiche, and 1/2 cup of olive oil in a blender. Puree until smooth, adding a

little water to loosen, if necessary. Season with salt and pepper and place in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

**Celery leaf salsa verde**

In a bowl, mix together the shallot, garlic, capers, anchovies, parsley, chervil, mint, basil, rosemary and lemon zest. Toss with 1 1/4 cups of the olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Cover and place in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

Please note: Celery leaves will be added to the verde just before serving.

**Radish salad**

Pick out the yellow celery heart leaves and reserve. Thinly slice celery stalks on a bias. Thinly slice radishes. Trim stems from watercress and place all three ingredients in a bowl. Place in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

**Cervena venison**

Preheat oven to 300° F.

Coat a heavy roasting pan with 1/4 cup olive oil and heat over medium flame. Slowly brown the meat, turning it often until the meat is evenly browned. Add a few rosemary sprigs and 1/4 cup of olive oil to pan. Place meat in the

oven and roast for approximately 20 minutes or until roasts reach an internal temperature of 125°.

Remove from the oven and allow the meat to rest for 10 minutes.

**To serve**

Add the reserved celery heart leaves to the salsa verde mixture and toss with juice from 1 1/2 lemons. Adjust seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste.

Place a large spoonful of fava bean-chevre puree on each of the six plates. Thinly slice venison roasts and place a few slices on top of puree. Spoon some of the salsa verde over meat.

Toss the radish and watercress salad with remaining lemon juice and 1/2 cup olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and place to the side of the venison.

*Chef Robbie Lewis  
Bacar, San Francisco*

This is an elegant warm weather dish that only takes about a half hour of oven time. The venison tastes equally delicious served warm or room temperature.