What is QDM?
Quality Deer Management or QDM is a philosophy of deer management that promotes a more mature, healthy, and balanced deer herd. The basic premise is that if you allow bucks to grow older they will produce larger antlers and if you balance the sex ratio, they will be exhibit more natural behavior that makes them easier to harvest during the rut.

To manage for quality deer, the first thing to decide is whether you have enough land to manage a population. Generally it requires 2,000 acres or more to manage a deer herd, although some degree of management can be done on smaller acreage. The second thing to decide is what level of quality deer management do you want. QDM is a sliding scale program and there is no one prescription. Managing for quality deer is not the same as managing for trophy deer. A healthy 6-point buck may be a quality deer to some while others are looking for a large 10-point buck. QDM can accommodate both groups.

Buck Harvest Strategy
Bucks do not reach maturity or their genetic potential until 5.5-years of age. Very few bucks ever reach this age due to the high harvest of bucks on most properties. Bucks are considered fully grown by 3.5-years of age. This will be the first time you get to see what a buck’s genetic potential might be. Therefore, a quality buck is usually defined as one that is at least 3.5-years old. An example of a quality buck might be an 8 point with a 15-inch inside spread. Hunters will need to set a minimum size limit on bucks harvested, to protect young bucks from being harvested. Initially, you should eliminate the harvest of yearling (1.5-years old) bucks by setting an antler point restriction that protects all yearling bucks. Typically this will be a minimum of 6 antler points but will vary due to the quality of the habitat. As the age structure improves, you will need to increase the minimum size allowable for harvest. This will be based on the average antler size by age class. The goal is to have at least 40% of your harvest coming from the 3.5-year age class and above. To accomplish this you need to protect as many bucks as possible that are less than 3.5-years old. If the majority of your harvest is coming from the 2.5-year age class, then you are harvesting too many young bucks and
this will slow down your program. You will need to increase your antler point restriction to protect more 2.5-year old bucks. Ideally, you need to learn to age bucks “on the hoof” based on body shape rather than antler characteristics. This is a better tool for reducing the harvest of young bucks.

**Doe Harvest Strategy**
Most hunters emphasize the harvesting of bucks, however, a balanced sex ratio is also very important to quality deer management. Many populations are out of balance due to the protection of does. Also, many areas experience a late breeding season. By the time breeding season begins, sex ratios are heavily skewed toward does because a lot of bucks and only a few does have been harvested. Because does only come into estrus for 24-36 hours once every 28 days, the few remaining dominant bucks have a difficult time breeding all available does. Consequently, many does either do not get bred or are bred late in the year, which results in late born fawns. Late born fawns are usually behind in antler growth for at least 2 years. What many hunters call “barren” does are simply does that were never bred because of skewed sex ratios. Out of balance herds also make hunting older bucks more difficult. Mature bucks will not move much, and will not be susceptible to calling or rattling when there are plenty of does to go around. Balancing the herd by reducing the harvest of bucks and increasing the harvest of does is vital to quality deer management.

**Harvesting of Fawns**
In an effort to harvest enough does, hunters will inevitably harvest some juvenile deer. The harvest of juvenile deer often includes a substantial number of “button” bucks. This is a situation that can be easily avoided by educating hunters about the accurate ways to identify fawn deer. One useful method is to compare the distance between the tip of the nose and the eye and the distance between the eye and the ears. If these distances are equal the deer is a fawn. If the nose to eye distance is longer then it is an adult doe. Also, when hunting food plots, the first deer to come out on a plot is usually a “button” buck. Hunters should wait for more deer to come out so comparisons can be made. Finally, use binoculars, not rifle scopes, to determine if a deer is a doe or a “button” buck.

**Supplemental Feeding**
Many areas of the southeast, especially the coastal plain, have inferior soil fertility and consequently, poor quality deer food. Optimal nutrition for deer is not met by native foods in these poor quality areas. For antler production, bucks require about 16% crude protein in their summer diet. Many native foods only reach 10-12% in the early summer. Forage crops of value to deer come primarily from the legume family. Crops such as soybeans, iron & clay cowpeas, peanuts, lab lab, and clovers are excellent choices depending on soil type. During the winter months, deer need food high in carbohydrates. Most winter food plot crops provide adequate carbohydrates. Typical crops include wheat, rye, oats, turnips, kale etc. Keep in mind that any new and unusual food such as cull potatoes may be ignored by deer for a year or so until they get used to them. In Florida, it is legal to bait with corn. Corn is a highly attractive food for deer and provides at least 70% carbohydrates. The value to supplemental corn is it ability to put weight on deer and improve their ability to make it through the rut in good shape. Deer will lose up to 25% of their body weight during the rut and this must be replaced before they can put much effort in growing next year’s set of antlers. Low post-season body weights will negatively affect next year’s antler size.

**Genetics**
While a popular subject with hunters, this is the least important factor in improving quality because it is not a manageable factor. Remember, dominant older bucks do most of the breeding and they didn’t get to be dominant with poor genetics. Also, does contribute 50% of the genes for antlers and picking out a doe with good genes for antlers, is impossible. Some people think that bringing in bucks from other parts of the country will help, but it doesn’t. If the animals survive the trip, and many don’t, their genes are swamped out of the population after a couple of generations of breeding with locally adapted native deer. The bottom line is that genetics is not a manageable factor and should be the least of your concern. Concentrate on letting young bucks grow up, balancing the sex ratio and improving nutrition.