

Deer Damage More Crops

FRANKLIN (Venango Co.) — With deer populations exceeding management goals in areas of Pennsylvania, farmers sometimes find it necessary to shoot deer for crop damage. The Pennsylvania Game and Wildlife Code provides for just such action by qualified farmers who make their livelihood from agriculture.

"Crop damage will vary from one farm to the next," said John Reese, a Crawford County farmer. "One farmer may not have that much damage to his crops while the farmer in the next township has extensive crop damage. We welcome deer hunters but they haven't been able to thin the herd enough in this neighborhood, so we have to shoot deer when extensive crop damage is actually happening. This is often in the summer and early fall."

Larry Harshaw is the northwest regional director for the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Over the years he has seen many examples of crop damage by deer. "We support the right of qualified farmers to shoot deer for crop damage to protect their livelihood as long as they follow the proper rules. Good farmers are kept very busy with their work. They usually don't shoot deer unless it's the last straw. And most of them cooperate with us to be sure the deer don't go to waste. Thus, we are able to give most of the crop kill deer to a family that can use the meat," said Harshaw.

"I feel we have reached a point where we are all working in the same direction. Years ago there were those who looked dimly upon farmers shooting deer for crop damage. Surely by now people realize the impact excessive deer damage can have on a farm family income. Recently farmers have been working with us to direct hunter's to crop damage areas, not just during the special extended deer season, but even during antlered and antlerless season," he said.

"I'm a farmer and I don't dis-

like deer," said Doug Gilbert, president of the Crawford County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association. "We all like to hunt deer. We like to see good deer hunters on our property. Fact is, the problem of too many deer is often caused by nearby property that's posted. The deer seek shelter on posted property by day and feed on our farm crops by night," he said.

"While most of the damage to my forage crops occurs this time of year, there are deer feeding in my fields every night of the year," Gilbert said.

Alan Dambach, a Beaver County nurseryman, said, "When we get snow cover, we really get problems. At our nursery, the shortest crop is four years (forsythia and arborvitea) and our longest crop is 13 years (Colorado Spruce). So the deer and I coexist for a lot of seasons before I harvest my nursery crop."

According to Lorraine Yocum, law enforcement supervisor, "The Game and Wildlife Code provides for qualified persons to shoot deer for crop damage. Those eligible are the farmer, the family members in his household, and employees who work for the farmer in his agricultural activities. Deer may be shot any time day or night, from a vehicle while upon the property where the damage is occurring," she said.

"After the animal is killed, the entrails must be removed and a report made to an officer of the commission within 24 hours. If the property is open to public hunting, the farmer may retain the meat from one deer for home consumption. All other deer must be turned over to the commission officer. The meat of the deer turned in is given to residents of Pennsylvania. Those receiving the deer for consumption are to be issued a required permit similar to those for a road killed deer. Head, hide, and antlers from all deer shot for crop damage are collected by the Game Commission," she said.

John Reese, a Penn State graduate in agriculture, has invited people on tours to look at crop damage in his fields. "People have to realize that farming is a vocation,

not an avocation," said Reese. "If we lose money due to crop damage, it has impact on our family income."

"We invite deer hunters to our

property. I would prefer that they thin the deer herd during hunting season, so we don't have a continuing problem during the next growing season," said Reese.

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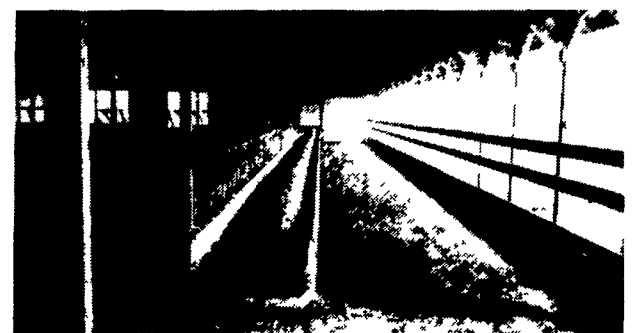
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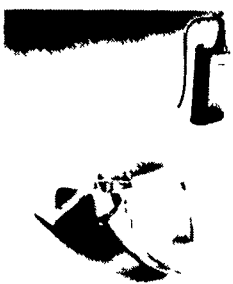
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