

Good afternoon,

I'm Andy Bater, Chairman of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's Wildlife and Fisheries Committee. I'd like to extend my gratitude to Senator Rothman, Senator Brewster, and the other members and staff of the Senate Game and Fisheries Committee for inviting me to speak today.

Before I delve into my remarks, I need to clarify that even though I'll be referencing data from the United States Department of Agriculture, my comments do not in any way reflect my other official responsibilities with the Pennsylvania branch of the USDA Farm Service Agency.

Wildlife damage to crops and livestock has been identified as the top priority by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's members. Being relatively new to my role as Chairman of our Wildlife & Fisheries Committee, I've dedicated the past year to traveling across the state, from Erie County to Chester County and Fayette County to Lackawanna County, speaking to farmers about this issue. One of the recurrent problems they face is damage caused by deer. Examples include soybeans nibbled down to the ground, Christmas trees deformed beyond repair, and the decimation of fields of sweet corn.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) confirms the scale of these losses through their crop insurance data. Recent reports place Pennsylvania at the forefront of states experiencing corn and soybean losses due to wildlife damage. <Exhibit 1 & 2> RMA has taken note. This year it has begun asking crop insurance adjusters across the region to inquire about farmers' preventive measures against wildlife damage.

Tactics to mitigate deer-induced damage vary, from the use of fencing to the application of bitter sprays, to of course hunting. My own farm is encircled by a mile of 8-foot deer fence. I've also experimented at a smaller scale with granular and liquid deterrents that deer find unpalatable. While effective, these measures are costly and time-consuming. Time, as we know, is invaluable for Pennsylvania farmers. Quite a significant percentage of our farmers support their agricultural endeavors with off-farm jobs. Today, I want to center our discussion on hunting.

I wish to commend the Game Commission for their Red Tag and DMAP programs, which have been beneficial for farmers like me. Yet, a challenge many farmers face is locating enough experienced, qualified, and respectful hunters willing to participate in these programs. I emphasize the words "experienced, qualified, and respectful." Unauthorized trespassing on farmlands by inconsiderate individuals remains a major issue for farmers and could warrant its own Senate hearing.

The decline in experienced hunters across Pennsylvania is a growing concern. Research by Dr. Duane Diefenbach from Penn State highlights this decline. <Exhibit 3> Historically, conservation hunting has been a cost-effective wildlife management tool. But how will we harness this tool in a future with fewer adept hunters?

For many to take up hunting, they must believe in their chances of success. It's common to hear hunters claim a decrease in deer numbers, while farmers often report the opposite. Both parties might be observing shifts in deer movement patterns over time. Consensus on deer population data used by the Game Commission is essential. We'd like to see more scientific assessments of the number of deer and their impact on agricultural lands.

Farmers on their own have the right to remove deer seen damaging crops. However, the required processes of field dressing and storing carcasses for the charitable food system are both time-intensive and logistically challenging, especially for those balancing farming with full-time jobs. We urge a reconsideration of these requirements.

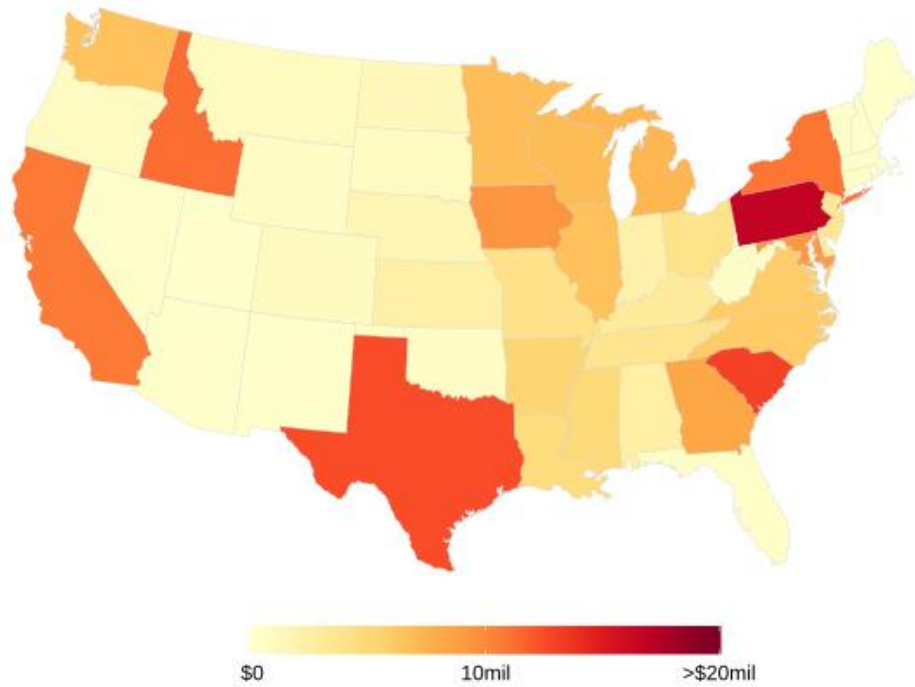
In conclusion, we're keen to forge new partnerships with the Game Commission and other wildlife management stakeholders. Our aim is to strike a harmonious balance between the splendors of nature and the needs of agriculture. We hope today's hearing marks the beginning of this collaborative journey.

Respectfully,

Andy Bater

Chairman, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Wildlife & Fisheries Committee

Exhibit 1



Corn Monetary Loss by State, 2017

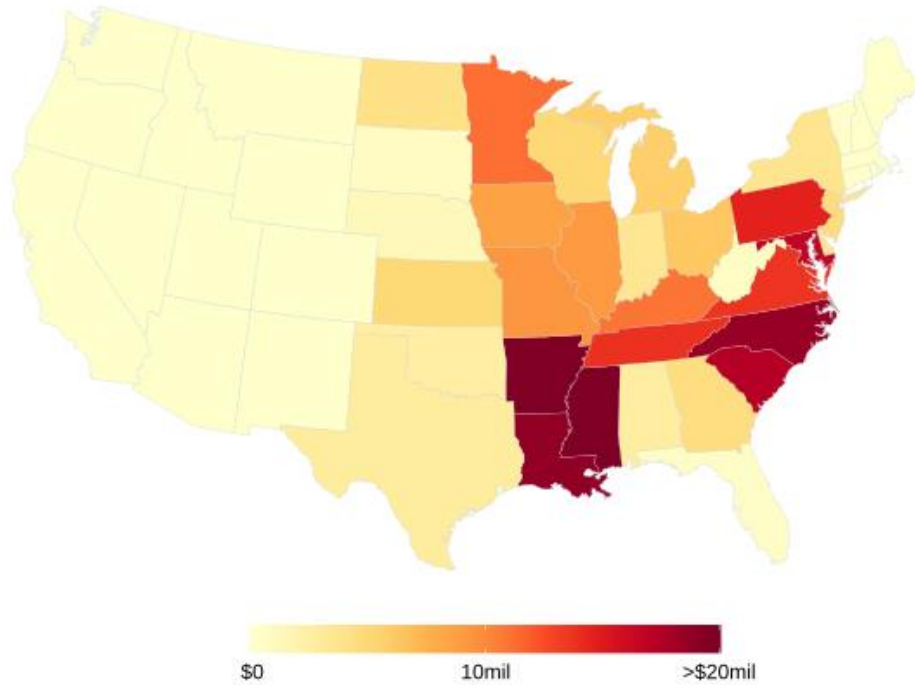
Estimation of wildlife damage from federal crop insurance data

Sophie McKee (*Colorado State University*), Stephanie A. Shwiff, Aaron M. Anderson

USDA/APHIS/WS National Wildlife Research Center

8-2020

Exhibit 2



Soybean Monetary Loss by State, 2017

Estimation of wildlife damage from federal crop insurance data

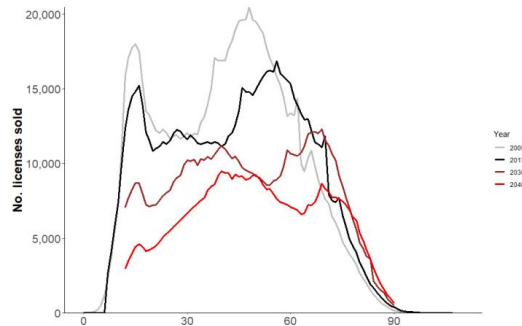
Sophie McKee (*Colorado State University*), Stephanie A. Shwiff, Aaron M. Anderson

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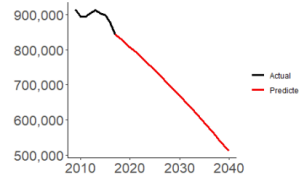
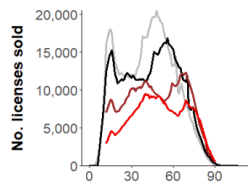
Exhibit 3

Aging Baby-Boomers are driving massive changes in Pennsylvania hunter numbers

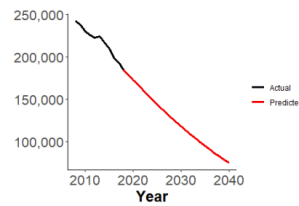
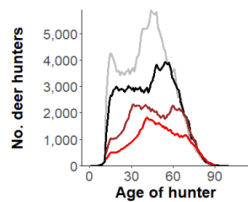


At the current rate, Pennsylvania will have about 500,000 hunters in less than 20 years

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How Decline In Hunter Numbers May Change Deer Management

8/2022

Duane R. Diefenbach

U.S. Geological Survey, Pennsylvania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

Pennsylvania State University