

Agricultural Damage

In 2004 the County's agricultural community declared that deer overpopulation was the number-one threat to farming in the County. Consequently, agricultural damage has been a particular focus of the DMWG's recommendations and continues to be an important concern. The nationally acclaimed Agricultural Reserve is an important component of the County's General Plan. It helps maintain protected farmland for future food and fiber as well as provide open space that contributes to the county's character and quality of life. The existence of the Agricultural Reserve depends on the continued viability of agriculture.

A 2004 survey of County farmers indicated significant losses to agricultural crops due to deer browse. Thirty-six (36) farmers reported losses on corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. Thirty-four (34) producers reported losses on tree fruit, small fruit or vegetables. Twenty-seven (27) producers suffered losses on nursery, Christmas trees, grapes and other agricultural crops. In all, over 2000 acres of agricultural land has been removed from production due to deer crop damage and 2/3 of survey respondents believed crop damage from deer was on the increase.

In May of 2014 an updated Deer Damage Survey was initiated and the results are outlined below. Please click on the link below to access the results from the 2014 Survey.

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agservices/Resources/Files/AAC_Meetings/October2014/Attachment_B.pdf

Farmers are using a variety of strategies to attempt to minimize damage to their crops. From the thirty-two (32) respondents they indicated the following:

63% have stopped raising certain crops due to deer damage.

45 % have made use of Crop Damage Permits.

97 % allowed deer hunting on land they owned or rented.

53 % have discussed with their hunters ways to increase the harvest of deer.

28% say they do not have a quota system in place requiring the harvest of Does before the harvest of bucks.

31% say they rent farmland where hunting is not allowed.

66% say that they farm on or adjacent to parkland.

94% say that deer damage is worst on farms adjacent to parks.

50% have family members that have contracted Lyme disease.

A total of 19,197 acres was included in the 2014 survey which represents 42% of the total cropland reported in the 2012 Agricultural Census-45,557 acres. The overall loss for acres reported was 16%. The crop loss of \$4,411,786 represents 9.3% of the Total Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold reported in the 2012 Agricultural Census-\$48,341,000.

The 2011 Wildlife Damage Survey conducted by Maryland Agricultural Statistics Service indicated central Maryland farmers had sustained estimated losses of over \$4.3 million due to deer browse. The central Maryland area includes Montgomery, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard and Washington Counties. Damage in the central Maryland region is reported to be much higher than in other areas. It should be noted that higher crop prices can result in increased economic losses even if actual amount of crop damage remains unchanged. Crop damage losses on corn and soybeans exceeded \$800,000 in 2009 with just a 5% crop loss across the entire crop. Field losses can range as high as 50 % in some areas. Some deer damage occurs in almost every field and on almost every crop. Overall, deer damage does not appear to have declined significantly despite more aggressive population control measures on both public and private land.

Deer Donation Program

The County's Deer Donation Program has expanded since it was initiated in 2004 (table 2). Administered through the Department of Economic Development – Agricultural Services Division and operated by members of the local agricultural community, this program enables farmers and hunters to harvest additional deer beyond what they need for personal use and donate the meat to a good cause. The number of deer donated increased from 2004 to 2011. For the past three years the number of deer being donated has been lower. One likely cause is that the recession is

causing hunters to keep more deer for their own use and to share with neighbors and family, leaving less meat to be donated. Also the program only has one cold box at this time located in Poolesville and we are working to develop an alternative approach where cold boxes can be leased and not purchased. The 75 deer donated last year provided nearly 3,000 pounds of meat donated to the Charitable Food organizations in the County.

By accepting extra or unwanted deer, the Deer Donation program has allowed some farmers to develop much more focused and effective hunting operations. Members of the agricultural community are now working more closely with their hunters to insure that more deer are being harvested. The Patriot Land and Wildlife Management Company, which provides management assistance for the donation program, has sponsored a Deer Donation Contest for the past three years to encourage hunters to harvest more deer. Some property owners have initiated organized one or two day hunts using groups of hunters to increase the harvest success and reduce deer numbers on their farms. The Deer Donation program facilitates these practices by providing an outlet for a large number of deer harvested at one time.

Table 2. Number of Deer and Pounds of Meat donated through the Deer Donation Program 2004 - 2015

<i>Deer Donation Program - Deer Collected and Pounds of Venison Donated</i>		
2004-2005 Season	39 deer	1,560 pounds
2005-2006 Season	51 deer	2,040 pounds
2006-2007 Season	85 deer	3,400 pounds
2007-2008 Season	197 deer	7,880 pounds
2008-2009 Season	150 deer	6,000 pounds
2009-2010 Season	304 deer	12,160 pounds
2010-2011 Season	403 deer	16,120 pounds
2011-2012 Season	222 deer	8,880 pounds
2012-2013 Season	163 deer	6,520 pounds
2013-2014 Season	152 deer	6,080 pounds
2014-2015 Season	75 deer	3,000 pounds
Totals	1,841 deer	73,640 pounds

More information on the Deer Donation program is available on the County website at:
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/AgServices/aginitiatives.html#deer>

The Deer Donation Program has invested \$200,000 over ten years. The value of the program is calculated to be \$699,580. This is based on the value of the meat collected (**73,640** lbs at \$2/lb) and the value of the commodity grain in the farmer's fields not consumed by these deer. **1,841** deer harvested, 2,000 lbs of grain saved for each deer harvested, average value of all commodity grain estimated at \$9/bushel).

Many changes have been made to State and local regulations and educational programs have been offered to citizens and communities in recent years aimed at helping the agricultural community reduce deer damage to their products. These efforts have made an impact, but crop damage by deer remains a problem for local farmers.