

Hunters Sharing the Harvest Program Will Reach One Million Pound Mark of Venison Donated This Season

Program provides opportunity for state's hunters to feed those in need

Harrisburg, PA – With nearly two million Pennsylvanians food insecure, programs that assist in efforts to help are essential. The state's hunters have an opportunity to provide food to residents at risk for hunger through the unique public-private partnership with the Hunters Sharing the Harvest (HSH) deer donation program. Earlier today, state officials from the Pennsylvania Departments of Agriculture and Conservation and Natural Resources, along with the Game Commission and state legislators joined representatives from HSH as well as the Central PA Food Bank, Hunger Free PA and Feeding Pennsylvania to kick off this year's donation program.

As HSH is marking its 24th year, all applauded the efforts of a program that has provided more than 200,000 meals annually to food banks, churches and social services feeding programs. Key, of course, is the hunters who donate more than 100,000 pounds of venison each year.

"When you consider the amount of food wasted in this country daily, you can't help but question how there are people going hungry?," said Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding. "We are a world-leader in agricultural production, yet one in seven Pennsylvanians struggle to secure enough food to eat. Hunters Sharing the Harvest is a way for us to help those in need and to do the right thing. Food is a basic human right and no one should go hungry."

The department and HSH just completed the first year of a renewed five-year contract between the organizations in support of the program.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, through the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program, contributes \$1.35 per pound of donated venison to reimburse processors. Based on \$1.35 per pound donated, the department will allocate up to \$125,000 per year to partially offset processor costs; this ceiling was attained in the 2014 hunting season.

"Hunger-Free Pennsylvania has been pleased to partner with Hunters Sharing the Harvest for close to 25-years" said Sheila Christopher, Executive Director of Hunger-Free Pennsylvania. "The growth of the program and commitment from the Pennsylvania hunting community throughout the years has been priceless to our organization and those who rely on our service."

"We are so thankful to Pennsylvania hunters that donate through the Hunters Sharing the Harvest program, bringing thousands of healthy venison meals to Pennsylvania families in need each year" said Joe Arthur, executive director of Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. "The need for nutritious food assistance remains at record high levels, so it is vitally important right now that we can count on hunters to donate their harvest through this safe and easy program."

"Feeding Pennsylvania is proud to partner and support Hunters Sharing the Harvest in their efforts to engage Pennsylvania hunters in the fight against hunger," said Jane Clements-Smith, the organization's executive director. "Our priority is to find ways to get more nutritious food to our families in need, and through this program we are able to provide them with high protein, lean, healthy meat."

Hunters can take their deer to one of 115 participating meat processors throughout the state and donate any amount of their venison to the program.

Pennsylvanians can also donate money to the Buck for the Pot campaign, which supports HSH. Corporate sponsorships are also welcome to assist with processing costs.

Hunter donations and support from a long list of state and private interests were acknowledged by the HSH Executive Director John Plowman. All, he said, have helped make the state's effort a benchmark other states hope to duplicate as it again rolls toward processing one million pounds of venison and providing two million meals. "Each year, we try to involve even more individuals in the program," said Plowman. "This year, we will reach the one million pound mark of donated venison and that is an accomplishment to be proud of. When you can take a program such as this one and help those in need, we know we've got the model right. We thank each of our partners for their help and support and look forward to this year and future years working together to feed Pennsylvanians"

Noting contributions by other state agencies, corporate and business sponsors, hunters and sportsmen's groups, DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said, "DCNR can best be described as a sideline player in this worthy effort.

"Since the inception of this great program, what DCNR has done is support and encourage deer hunting on the 2.2 million acres of state forestland and roughly 80 percent of the state parklands it maintains," the secretary said. "We encourage hunters to continue being our invaluable partners in areas where our foresters and park managers deem deer control is necessary. Often that is in areas designated as Deer Management Assistance Program, or DMAP, areas where -- if a second deer is harvested -- chances are better that it might be donated to Hunters Sharing the Harvest.

Since 2006, DCNR's Bureau of Forestry has reimbursed the Department of Agriculture \$50 for every deer donated to HSH that was harvested with a DMAP tag on state forestland.

Game Commission Executive Director R. Matthew Hough said, nationwide, HSH has been the leader in charitable venison donations. The commission has long partnered with HSH, and Hough said the agency is proud of what the program represents and what it shows about the generosity of Pennsylvania's hunters. "What greater act of kindness is there than feeding someone who is hungry?" Hough asked. "There certainly aren't many, and through their donations, it's obvious our hunters understand that."

Established in 1991, Hunters Sharing the Harvest has 53 participating counties and provides more than 450,000 meals annually to food banks, churches and social service feeding programs. In 2014, hunters donated nearly 97,000 pounds of venison to more than 4,000 emergency food assistance agencies through the state's 21 regional food banks.

For more information about the program, visit www.sharedeer.org, or call 866-474-2141.