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**Bear Hunt Furor Puts Spotlight on Wildlife in New Jersey
NEW JERSEY FARM BUREAU URGES INCREASE OF PUBLIC AWARENESS
ON HUNTING & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT**

TRENTON, NJ (December 6, 2004) -- Bears are in the cornfields, deer are on the highways, wild turkeys have returned, coyotes are coming, resident geese are ubiquitous -- by some counts, New Jersey has more wildlife today than it did back in the 1600s. New Jersey's six-day firearm hunting season begins today, making a small dent in the overabundance. Farmers throughout the state advocate hunting as the best and most immediate means to control the excessive wildlife numbers and accompanying crop damage. But they also recognize that hunting isn't the full answer and they urge state funding for wildlife management initiatives that go beyond hunting, according to the New Jersey Farm Bureau, the grass-roots organization that represents 19,000 farmers and farm-related entities.

"While the bear hunt was set aside by the New Jersey Supreme Court, the controversy has focused public attention on hunting in general," says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the New Jersey Farm Bureau.

"Many other species of wildlife are proliferating throughout New Jersey at a fearsome rate, threatening parks, forests and rivers, as well as farms. The recently released Fairleigh-Dickinson PublicMind survey on public opinions of farming in New Jersey addressed hunting as a viable means of limiting wildlife damage to crops -- 57% of New Jerseyans surveyed support it."

Dave Sheppard, a farmer in Cumberland County and past president of the county's Board of Agriculture, sees a burgeoning problem with deer populations and accompanying decimation of young crops. "During the past 15 years, this population has exploded. Mild winters and increasing suburbs are contributing to deer having more young," says Sheppard. "Where they used to have one or two offspring, I now see them often with three and they all love nibbling tender young vegetable shoots as well as lovely suburban plantings. They not only threaten vegetation, they also carry Lyme disease. The hunting season is a crucial component of controlling these populations."

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The New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife also advocates hunting. "When we get inquiries, we always suggest hunting as a first means of controlling populations. It's the most effective and most economical," says Larry Herrigty, chief of the division's Bureau of Wildlife Management.

According the bureau's latest figures, wildlife populations in New Jersey are as follow:

- >Bears: 1,600-3,200
- >Deer: 170,000
- >Turkeys: 35,000
- >Resident geese: 85,000-90,000. State and federal wildlife authorities estimate that the resident goose population may double in the next five years.

Crop damage by wildlife is no small problem nationwide. A 2004 Purdue University study shows estimates of wildlife-related losses to agricultural producers in the United States exceeding \$4.5-billion per year. A 2002 Rutgers Cooperative Extension study of wildlife damage to agricultural crops on just 1,410 acres in northern and southern New Jersey shows a dollar loss of \$1,767,404.77 (averaging \$1,253.48 per acre). The most damage, more than \$1-million worth, was caused by white-tailed deer, followed by groundhogs, causing more than \$1/4-million, and Canada geese causing nearly \$36,000 worth.

The Farm Bureau also sees wildlife as a neglected factor in municipalities' large-lot zoning to control sprawl, with big estates acting as preserves for free-ranging wild animals. "People who purchase such large parcels for individual homes must be educated to understand New Jersey's critical need to maintain a natural balance," says Nieuwenhuis.

"Farmers have a comprehensive understanding of the land and how it's affected by many factors now coming to the fore in legislative decisions. Farm viability depends on smart wildlife management practices, which include the Fish and Game Council's changes in the game code to increase the deer harvest and the establishment of more communication among the Department of Agriculture and agricultural agencies," he concludes.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a member organization of more than 19,000 farmers and farm-related entities within the Garden State. It is the only organization solely dedicated to representing the grass- roots interests and directives of its members in educating all levels of government and the public on the farm community's policies and positions. The Farm Bureau also takes a lead in seeking out initiatives, activities and ventures to enhance the profitability of producer members and the ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason*.

For further information, contact the New Jersey Farm Bureau, at The Farmhouse, 168 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608. Phone 609-393-7163; fax 609-393-7072; email mail@njfb.org; website www.njfb.org

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