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**NEW JERSEY FARM BUREAU URGES DEP TO STAND FIRM ON BEAR HUNT THIS FALL  
Applauds Fish & Wildlife Proposed Game Code Amendments**

**Trenton, NJ (September 8, 2005)** -- In 1995, after addressing the New Jersey Agriculture Convention on the coming bear problem, Sussex County farmer Tom Brodhecker gained the moniker, "Bear-Roll Tom." "No one took me seriously when I said bears were rolling in our cornfields and flattening corn in circles that resembled UFO landings," he says. "Now, It's a very different story." Brodhecker estimates that he lost 20% of his corn crop to bears last year. This year, the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife issued bear alerts for all 21 counties in the state.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau, on behalf of its more than 18,000 farm families, is pleased that the Fish & Game Council approved 2005-2006 Game Code amendments that include a hunting season for black bears. Farm Bureau now urges the Council and DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell to complete their work on a comprehensive bear management strategy so that the December hunt can occur as the code provides. Per last year's New Jersey Supreme Court decision, a strategy for the long-term management of the bear population must be adopted before a hunt can be held.

"When farmers' profit margins are wiped out by five-percent crop damage, 20% is devastating," says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the Farm Bureau. "Farmers have a comprehensive understanding of the land and the sustainable ratio of people to wildlife, and they feel the New Jersey ratio is way out of balance, with an overflow of wildlife that has no natural predators and hence continues to multiply in unsustainable numbers. Our research has shown that farming is important to people who live in the state and farm viability depends on smart wildlife management practices"

The Farm Bureau is encouraged that this year's Game Code seems to recognize the plight farmers face, with overwhelming wildlife populations damaging 20% or more of their annual crops. The code also includes allowances for farmers to take antlered and antlerless deer in numbers sufficient to reduce their population and provisions for taking Canada geese, within the federal limits. While Farm Bureau would like to see a more liberal policy for the hunting of geese, it appreciates that the code provides a measure of flexibility to allow for any future changes in federal regulation of Canada Geese.

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### **Evidence of Growing Bear Problems**

From the time Tom Brodhecker bought his farm in 1969, until the 1990's, he'd see one bear a year. He began to notice an increase in the early 90's and two years ago, during the first hunt, he noted 13 bears killed within 1/2 mile of his house. "But the bears do keep down the deer population," he quips. He maintains that hunting takes out the most aggressive and dangerous bears that don't fear human contact.

Tom Michalenko, president of the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture, sees a growing bear problem there. "I think that New Jersey has a higher bear population today than any time in its history. Wildlife has a plentiful food supply and better diet than forest vegetation can provide. Now wildlife has tender crops and household garbage."

The major bear populations are concentrated in Sussex, Hunterdon, Warren and western Passaic counties, but sightings and damage complaints occur farther south each year. Farm Bureau continues to see ongoing problems with deer and Canada geese overrunning farmland in every county. While studies on various contraception methods and increased education/awareness campaigns are all acceptable management tactics, Farm Bureau maintains that hunting is the most viable and practical means of controlling all of these forms of wildlife, and must remain as a management tool.

According to the Fish & Game Council's late 2004 figures, wildlife populations in New Jersey are as follows:

- >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.

Tom Jarvis' farm, Springdale, is the last in urban Cherry Hill and sits adjacent to forest and wetlands -- perfect habitat for deer that inundate his property and last year destroyed more than 20% of his crops. "Cherry Hill doesn't give farmers dispensation to shoot deer or take them out with bow & arrow," he says. "We have no means of controlling them. They sleep in the forest, drink from the stream and have breakfast, lunch and dinner in our fields. It's a great life; they don't have to do much to flourish and multiply."

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.

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"We feel that this 2005-2006 Game Code strikes the correct delicate balance, representing the many and varied interests of state residents, while basing amendments on sound science rather than special interests and we applaud the Fish & Game Council. The code will be a useful tool for the agriculture industry and we are pleased with its adoption." Niewenhuis concludes.

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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 ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason -- our farms.*

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