



# Discussion Topic

November 2006

A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

## Hunting lease agreements: Are they win-win?

Horror stories can be overheard in nearly every small-town coffee shop. A guy tripped in the woods while hunting on a farmer's property without permission, shot himself in the foot and sued the farmer. Ain't no protection against that, is there?

"In fact, there is liability protection for farmers against these types of things," said Tonia Ritter, a lobbyist with Michigan Farm Bureau. "Part 733 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act spells it all out." Find that provision on the Michigan Farm Bureau Web site at [www.michiganfarmbureau.com](http://www.michiganfarmbureau.com), and click on the Hunting Lease Agreement section under "other resources."

Knowing, then, that there is protection, why are farmers and other landowners so often accused of limiting access to hunting land? If they need help harvesting deer to cut down on crop damage, Ritter said, hunters are a fine resource, and one that hunting advocacy groups say are under-used.

Among the reasons for that perception, Ritter said, is that farmers, many of whom hunt themselves or have the hunting rights on their land already secured by family members or long-time, trusted hunters, are hesitant to open up their land to new hunters who they don't know and with whom they have no relationship. So how can those relationships be built?

"More frequently these days," Ritter said, "farmers are leasing their land to hunters. When a farmer decides to do that, it can provide a little extra income and help keep the local deer population down. But the next question is how much do you charge?"

If the right to hunt is given away, Ritter said, it may be perceived as having little value. But many hunters who ache for secure, private lands on which to hunt are willing to pay a pretty good price.

"I know of at least one case where the farmer gets \$1,000 for a group of four to hunt on 120 acres for the entire deer season," she said. "But these leases can be split up. There are bow seasons, muzzle-loading season and special youth seasons," she said. "There are small game seasons too, so the opportunities are there. Farmers don't have to charge outrageous fees, but with a little ingenuity, they can probably find a way to generate a little extra income from their land and gain the benefit of having hunters help them."

Hunters, too, need to be responsible and follow a farmer's instructions. If that means a lease agreement that outlines their responsibilities, many hunters are willing to begin the process. A sample lease agreement also is on the Michigan Farm Bureau Web site.

"If I owned a farm and wanted hunters to help me control wildlife, I'd run a classified ad in our magazine or yours," said Sam Washington, executive director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs. "We've got to get the buyer and seller together. We've gotten beyond the insurance difficulties, and we feel that only one in 10,000 farmers has something on their property that's grossly negligent, like an open well. A lot of our members lease hunting property, and the arrangement with the farmer has become a tradition."

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe hunters will be more responsible if they're paying to hunt on your property? Why or why not?
2. How do you determine what price to charge for hunting lease agreements?
3. Why are some farmers reluctant to allow new hunters on their land? Why are some absentee landowners (or non-farming landowners) hesitant?
4. What would be the best way to solicit for hunters or match hunters with landowners? Could your county Farm Bureau develop tools?