



Discussion Topic

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

QUESTIONS

1. How many days during hunting season are hunters hunting your property? How can you increase that number?
2. Why do you believe farmers become distrustful of hunters? How can that trust be reestablished? Please share your experiences with hunters – good or bad – within your discussion group.
3. What's the potential income for a farmer who enters into lease agreements with hunters? Is there potential for more?

Lease agreements with hunters: A good tool underused?

With concern among Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officials and other groups about the declining number of hunters, pressure tends to increase on farmers.

For years, arguments between the groups have continued with no obvious solution. Farmers still suffer deer damage to their crops, and hunters still say they can't find private land on which to hunt.

Two things are certain, however. More hunters kill more deer, and fewer deer eat fewer crops. And if farmers and hunters alike can agree to try to attain both their goals, everyone wins.

How to attain them is where the difficulty arises.

In a 2003 interview with Michigan Farm News, Michigan Natural Resources Commissioner Bob Garner encouraged farmers to "seek out more good hunters." He also encouraged hunters to be respectful of the land they're on, and to be responsible enough to ease farmers' fear of liability lawsuits.

Farm Bureau Insurance officials say hunters are covered under homeowner's insurance policies, but there's another way for farmers to be sure the hunters to whom they give access will be safe and responsible. It's the hunter access lease agreement.

Easily downloadable from the Michigan Farm Bureau Web site (www.michiganfarmbureau.com), a sample agreement (individual farmers are encouraged to tailor an agreement for their own operation) spells out how much will be paid by the hunter to the farmer, which land the hunter is allowed to hunt, and standard behavioral expectations.

With all the terms spelled out, Garner said, farmers can rest assured that rogue or unsafe hunters are kept out (hunters who have paid for the privilege tend to get possessive about their hunting spots), and can concentrate on finding the right number of hunters to ease the crop damage problem.

"Encourage the hunter to bring his son or daughter," Garner said. "Try allowing two more hunters the next year, and if there is still damage, add another the next year. The farmer will be able to find the right number of hunters who can control the herd and do it safely."

Remember too, that between bow season, gun and muzzle-loading seasons, there needn't be more than a few days between Oct. 1 and Jan. 1 when hunters are not on your farm, helping control the deer herd, which in turn helps protect crops.