

**TESTIMONY
PRESENTED TO THE
PA HOUSE GAME & FISHERIES
COMMITTEE**

BY

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Good evening. My name is Joel Rotz, State Governmental Relations Director, for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is the state's largest general farm organization with over 50,000 family members, many of which are private landowners who control over 7.7 million acres or about 80% of the huntable lands in the state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this evening.

The Farm Bureau truly is a grassroots driven organization. Our policy development process begins with our county Farm Bureaus where members initiate an idea or view on an issue. If it is supported by a majority of vote of members at their county annual meeting, the policy resolution moves to the state or national level of Farm Bureau for final discussion and decision. The issue of expanding Sunday hunting has been revisited many times by Farm Bureau members over the years and the outcome of the discussion has consistently been overwhelming opposition to any expansion of Sunday hunting privileges in Pennsylvania.

Perhaps one of the best examples of how strongly our members oppose any expansion of Sunday hunting was a debate several years ago regarding allowances for groundhog hunting. Groundhogs are perhaps one of the most exasperating forms of wildlife on farms because of the extensive amount of damage their digging and tunneling can do to fields and more importantly farm equipment. Our members still decided that having six days a week for groundhog hunting was enough and that first day of the week, Sunday, needed to be preserved for their own peace and quiet and enjoyment of their property without the interruption by hunters.

Proponents of Sunday hunting have often suggested various forms its expansion such as allowing state game and other public lands to be open. Our members believe it would be impossible for the Pennsylvania Game Commission with its already limited resources to enforce trespass laws meant to keep hunters on public lands who would inevitably wonder onto private lands either knowingly or unknowingly. The same concern arises with discussion about allowing for hunting on Sunday on private lands by permission only. While proponents of Sunday hunting talk of tougher trespass laws to keep hunters on designated lands that would be open for Sunday hunting, landowners know from experience that there are not enough resources to enforce current trespass laws let alone expanded ones.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau as an organization is very supportive of hunting and the important role hunters play in managing wildlife in the state. The organization has never encouraged members to prohibit hunting on their land even though we recognize and support the landowners' rights to do so. We have worked for decades to build constructive relationships with the Pennsylvania Game Commission and its staff to help keep privately owned lands open and accessible to hunters in managing wildlife to help minimize the need for farmers to take deer and other wildlife for crop damage. A major concern for Farm Bureau is what will happen to the decades of progress that have been made in these areas if Sunday hunting is expanded against the will of the majority of private landowners.

Proponents of Sunday hunting often point to the current prohibitions as being the last of what they refer to as "arcane blue laws" that should be changed to fit societal views of today. There is a significant difference to the Sunday hunting issue when compared to such matters as Sunday retail and liquor sale bans that have been changed by societal views in our lifetimes. One

difference is that retail establishments sought the change for their own benefits. They welcomed the incursion of the public on their properties on Sundays to expand business opportunities. Farmers generally do not operate that type of business and receive no economic benefit from being open to hunting on Sundays. In fact, what is most frustrating to farmers in this debate is the arrogance of the assumption that somehow privately owned land should be available to hunters seven days a week with no recognition of the fact that farms are not only privately owned businesses, but families' homes as well. Proponents of Sunday hunting may describe the prohibition as an "arcane blue law," but many private landowners including farmers see the prohibition as preserving their right to enjoy peace and tranquility on their own land with family and friends the first day of the week without the concern of sharing their property with hunters.

As stated earlier, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is very supportive of the sport of hunting and of hunters and the important role they play in managing wildlife. As I have visited with members of the Pennsylvania House, I have heard the concern from some that our young people are not taking up the sport of hunting because of competing activities and that somehow Sunday's are more available to schedule hunting. I believe other sporting activities have already claimed time on Sundays and like everything else in life the decisions that parents and youth have to make about how time is spent comes down to priorities. If hunting is the priority, then soccer or football is not, and adding another day of hunting will not change the priority choice that needs to be made.

If hunters need more time for proper wildlife management and hunting opportunities, add more Saturdays or entire weeks to the season. However, it is worth noting that currently in Pennsylvania you can do some form of deer hunting 103 days per year including 18 Saturdays, and that does not account for all the red tag opportunities throughout the growing season that farmers welcome hunters to partake. Landowners don't have a problem with expanding hunting seasons, but 80% of landowners surveyed by the PA Legislative Budget & Finance Committee in 2005 said they did not want Sunday hunting. In fact, 18% of those same landowners who currently owned land open to public hunting were so incensed by the thought of Sunday hunting that they indicated they would post their land. The same survey indicated nearly half of the hunters responding did not favor expanding Sunday hunting. It would seem this is not a large segment of people who wish to infringe on others use and enjoyment of public and private lands on Sunday.

The affects of Sunday hunting on all residents of Pennsylvania need to be considered. We hope that any outcomes of these committee proceedings would be based on the needs and wants of the majority of those affected by the decision. Not based on tax revenues, or perceived revenue to the Game Commission. The most recent study done by Penn State found that our state's farmers pay dearly to feed our wildlife, that 1997 study sited white tailed deer alone, costing farmers nearly \$75,000,000 annually. Those who pay to feed the deer and provide access for free, simply ask for their Sundays to remain family time and not be interrupted by hunters or gunshots.

I now want to allow a Farm Bureau leader and private landowner to speak from her perspective as to how this issue impacts her and fellow Farm Bureau members.