

Good morning,

I'm Andy Bater, Chairman of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's Wildlife and Fisheries Committee. I'd like to extend my gratitude to Chairwoman Kulik, Republican Chairman Maloney, and the other members and staff of the House Game & Fisheries Committee for inviting me to speak today.

Before proceeding with my remarks, I need to clarify that my comments do not in any way reflect my other official responsibilities with the Pennsylvania branch of the USDA Farm Service Agency.

Crop damage caused by wildlife has been identified as a top priority by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau members. Being relatively new to my role as Chairman of our Wildlife & Fisheries Committee, I dedicated much of 2023 to traveling across the state, from Erie County to Chester County and Fayette County to Lackawanna County, speaking to farmers about this issue. One of the recurrent problems they face is damage caused by deer. Examples include soybeans nibbled down to the ground, Christmas trees deformed beyond repair, and the decimation of fields of sweet corn. This is not a localized issue, farms of all sizes and commodities are impacted.

For one Farm Bureau member in Crawford County, grain corn yields have been slashed in half and in certain fields soybeans can't be planted at all due to deer. For example, in one eight-acre section of soybeans, this farmer's average yield should have been around 80 bushels per acre. His yield was closer to 15 bushels per acre. With a bushel of soybeans worth \$13 and a 65 bushel per acre loss, that one eight-acre section of field would result in a loss of nearly \$7000. This simply isn't sustainable for the farmer. It's also not sustainable for the consumer as they too will ultimately be impacted at the grocery store cash register. This preventable waste in our agricultural system is untenable when record numbers of the Commonwealth's residents are food insecure. That's why we're supportive of the comprehensive crop damage mitigation plan outlined in House Bills 2106-2108.

House Bill 2107 amends Title 34 (Game) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to direct the Pennsylvania Game Commission to create an online network through which farmers can contact licensed hunters to manage deer populations on their property. With declining hunter numbers and an aging farmer population, this bill provides the opportunity for sportsmen to have increased private land access and farmers with additional hunters to help manage deer. We've been working closely

with the Game Commission and several hunting groups, and this bill would be a solution that benefits all parties.

House Bill 2108 would amend Title 34 (Game) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to require that at least one member of the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners has a background in agriculture. Agriculture is the number one industry in the Commonwealth, generating approx. \$135.7 billion in total economic impact and supporting nearly 580,000 jobs. Additionally, Pennsylvania farmers manage 7.3 million acres of land in the Commonwealth. Having a commissioner with a background in agriculture is critical to the long-term sustainability of our industry. To my knowledge there are currently two commissioners who meet the definition of a farmer included in House Bill 2108. This bill will ensure when those individuals are no longer serving someone who has agricultural expertise will be appointed.

Lastly, but by no means less important, House Bill 2106 would increase trespass penalties to better align us with neighboring states. This is something that Farm Bureau members have been in favor of for many years. As landowners, we bear the brunt of hunting trespass. House Bill 2016 also repeals the prohibition on Sunday hunting. In accordance with Pennsylvania Farm Bureau policy, we're supportive of Sunday hunting if all the policy priorities included in House Bills 2106 – 2018 are included. These crop damage mitigation measures as outlined in Representative Steele's legislation meet our policy objectives, therefore enabling our support of Sunday hunting.

In conclusion, we're supportive of House Bills 2106-2108 and look forward to finding crop damage solutions that work for farmers and hunters alike. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Andy Bater

Chairman, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Wildlife & Fisheries Committee