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**White-Tailed Deer and  
the Costs to Farmers'  
Livelihoods: A Case  
Study of New Jersey  
Stories**

## **IN THEIR WORDS**

**Two Examples of  
Farmer Stories**

Joseph B. Paulin  
Nazia N. Arbab  
Brian J. Schilling



**RUTGERS**

New Jersey Agricultural  
Experiment Station

## In Their Words – Story from Case Study 1

When I was a boy, it was a treat to see a deer. You didn't want to shoot it. You wanted to shoot it with a camera. I've been farming my whole life. I started on my own in high school or college. I've done a lifetime of this.

I'm overridden with deer here. If you pull into my farm at night, you can easily see 30-40 deer. My income should be substantially better. My yields are \$150,000-\$200,000 less per year than they should be with my acreage. Each year, the deer can make the difference between a profit and a loss.

People don't realize that this affects several generations. There will be no more farms. You have to preserve those livelihoods. Understand that not only is it jeopardizing my ability to provide safe and healthy food, but it's also impacting the community around you, your health and safety.

Local farms had a major impact in us surviving COVID-19. People need to look at agriculture as essential to them and not just a business. A farm is part of the essential infrastructure around them that puts food on their tables. When you preserve a farm, you're preserving the future of your food source.

There are many hidden costs from deer. There are long-term environmental impacts from overgrazing. Soil erosion and impacts to the water supply. You have to use more fertilizers and herbicides. There's frustration and emotional costs. There's increased liability insurance for a fleet of farm trucks because of deer collisions. There's been impacts of damage to equipment from an antler going through a \$4,000 tire, more than once, and running a deer carcass through a combine. We're always concerned about a deer running out in front of you while you're in harvest or planting.

I've entirely dropped whole farms because of deer damage. The only reason I started growing sorghum at all was because deer don't like it as much as other crops. It's been so long that we've been having deer damage, my expectations for the yields are a lot less than they used to be. I'm probably underestimating the damage.

Over time, deer grazing on soybeans, it's going to kill you. I've had it grazed right to the ground. Some graze can help increase production in the beginning of the season. A little grazing in soybeans can be beneficial, but more often than not, because of the size of the deer herd, they're detrimental. They never just lightly graze, always over graze.

Deer eat a lot more than other wildlife. Corn damage is worst on the perimeter of the fields than the middle. Damage is always worst in smaller fields no matter what the crops are. Corn yields are consistently reduced by 20-30% every year.

Rye straw damage is mostly physical damage from rolling and a little grazing in early to mid-spring. Grass hay is hard to measure. There's grazing, take out about 5% of the overall crop. You end up with soil compaction. If a pasture is grazed, you're not even going to bale it.

Weather also affects deer damage. The later you get in the growing season, the more impact the deer will have. The deer will out graze the growing of the crop. In 2019 it was worse, we got the crop in late because of wet weather. The yields were lower than they should have been. In 2020 I got the crop in earlier, harvested more deer, and one of the landlords got up a deer fence around a few hundred acres.

I see financial incentive to fence. I just can't afford it. We don't always have authority to put it up or manpower to maintain it. I have leases for most of my crops, but I don't control it. If it's my own land it might be cost effective, but not for all the fields. You don't see a hay or grain farmer ever put it up. I've seen increases in

damage because operations around me are putting up fence. They divert the deer to me.

Depredation permits, years ago we used them. I've had issues in the past with homeowners, hunters, animal advocates, and landlords. That's just part of the problem. I don't want liability because of kids trespassing all the time.

Hunters can't take enough deer. Some hunters that hunt rented properties are not hunting does. Landlords control hunting rights, but some landlords don't allow hunting, or they lease to gun clubs.

Repellents, they don't do sh\*t. They might do a little until it rains. It's too expensive for a crop growing from April to October. It has to be reapplied every time it rains. If you put them on, 5 days later there's new growth that it's not on. That's what the deer are eating.

It's hard to put a number on the hours spent every year on deer management because it's just incorporated into management period.

We've been telling our story for a long time. I think the damage and risk to society as a whole has not been told. Deer are responsible for damage to property, public safety, and people's livelihoods. This is a real problem, and the politicians need to take action. Unless they take action, they're contributing to the problem.

Policymakers need to take into account environmental impacts, residential damage, health and safety of deer collisions, and health of the deer population. There's a lot that needs to be considered. How long can you sustain this level of overpopulation without some type of detrimental effect to the herd?

We need a comprehensive herd reduction program. Future deer management and development have to adapt together. Until the herd becomes manageable, we need to make it a year-round effort.

We need to reduce burdens, regulations, and fees to hunters. Find avenues to public good through processing and feeding programs to get protein to the needy so it doesn't go to waste. Incentivize doe harvest and donations to food banks. No cost to the hunter and not counted against the hunter's limit. Increase funding for programs like Hunters Helping the Hungry. Figure out ways for donation through depredation permits during the summer months. Use sharpshooters in suburban areas where you can't hunt and donate the venison.

## - Case Study Farmer

## In Their Words – Story from Case Study 2

We are a large, growing farm. We deal with the deer and add fencing as we expand. I've been trying to reduce losses, but because we are continuously expanding, there's not enough time to fence off more of the area.

If we are going to see agriculture succeed near residential areas of New Jersey, we need to take into account for a balance of people, nature, and an appropriate amount of wildlife. We need to find a healthy balance for our forests and our roadways. There's a lot of land in the area owned by the township. They do little to no deer management. There's also green space that has little to no management. That's a problem.

I see more deer in residential neighborhoods than on my farm. Because we have woods, they can disappear during the day and come out at night and feed on the farm. I have land enrolled in a golden-winged warbler conservation project for forest regeneration. The deer damage is getting bad enough that it may not be suitable for golden-winged warblers.

We haven't entirely stopped farming a field because of deer damage, but have restricted going to new areas until we can get a fence up. We could have farmed tomatoes, squash and other vegetables. The estimated loss is about \$5,000. We've used 4-ft electric fence and a 6-ft fence, but the deer hop over and have knocked down some of the fence. We plan to add 8-ft high-tensile woven wire fence in the future.

Early on we used repellents, chemical and cayenne pepper. Every time it rains you have to go out and reapply. I haven't seen anything worth the time in the long run.

I don't hunt myself, but allow others to hunt on the land. Pretty much every place that can be hunted in the area is hunted, but some people only hunt bucks. We need to find ways to better

expand hunting to harvest more deer, seasons and bag limits.

We need to facilitate more ways for hunters to donate to foodbanks. Make it easier. A no-cost option to get the deer from the hunter to the foodbank.

We're interested in getting depredation permits for deer, bear and coyote. The coyotes eat our chickens. The coyotes and fox will take a hit on the electric fence to get a chicken. We've also had Cooper's hawks, red-tailed hawks, fox, bear, raccoons, and sometimes owls eating the chickens.

There's lots of bears in the area. The bears damaged the coop by ripping off the door and pulled out a 50-pound bag of corn. Sometimes a bear will grab a chicken. We lost about 100-feet of electric fence that was dragged off by a bear. Bears also damage fruit trees by breaking branches and eating the fruit.

## - Case Study Farmer