

# Deer donations feed families

BY BAILLIE JAMES  
Staff Reporter

The Adair County harvest for opening weekend of firearm deer season was up 14 percent this year compared to last year, closing with 1,289 deer tagged.

So far hunters have donated approximately one ton of venison to local food banks to feed hungry families.

Conservation agent Marsha Jones said the majority of deer donated to the Share the Harvest program are donated after firearm season's opening weekend.

"From a management perspective, we always like to see a good harvest in the fall," Jones said. "Last year during the firearm season opening weekend, we had poor weather, and that drives hunters out of the woods so we don't have good numbers."

Jones said the department hopes the Adair County harvest will reach approximately 3,000 deer by the end of all deer seasons, which will leave hunters with an excess of venison.

The Share the Harvest program can remedy that problem. The Missouri Department of Conservation started the program 18 years ago for hunters to donate unwanted venison to local food banks. Morgan's Processing in Greentop, Mo., processes Share the Harvest deer for Adair County. It is the company's second year participating.

Terry Morgan, owner of Morgan's Processing, said the number of deer donated to his company increased this year from

about 50 to 80 deer. He said most hunters donate the entire deer, although they could elect to donate only a portion.

"We supply Lancaster and we supply Kirksville food pantry," Morgan said. "We grind every bit of the deer and put it in one-pound packages that say 'Share the Harvest' on them, and then the food pantries come and pick it up. It's a good cause, it really is."

Morgan said that at his company, the hunter pays \$10 to process the deer, the food bank pays \$10 per deer and the Missouri Conservation Federation covers the rest of the cost. Morgan said government funding probably could have paid for the entire processing fee this year, but that they charged hunters anyway because funding for next year is uncertain.

Marvin Flynn, volunteer at the Christian Community Food Depot in Kirksville, said he picks up venison from Morgan's Processing approximately every three days and that he and his wife load it into the three deep freezers at the food bank. When the freezers are full, Flynn said he calls the food bank at Lancaster or the other Kirksville food distributors, like the Salvation Army and the Kirksville Church of the Nazarene.

"If we didn't have Share the Harvest, we would have to take money that's donated to the food banks and buy meat with it," Flynn said. "With Share the Harvest, we can operate for four or five months, depending on the demand, before we have to buy more meat."

Flynn said the meat lasted three and a half months last year, and

that they used the freezers' of food bank volunteers to preserve all the meat. He said the distributors have not had to store meat outside the food banks yet this year, but that the freezers at Christian Community are already full.

"If [hunters] get more than they can use for their own personal use, then it is an outstanding thing for them to do to give Share the Harvest whatever they can spare," Flynn said. "Three years ago, I didn't know a whole lot about Share the Harvest. It wasn't publicized very much. But now the Conservation Office has pitched in, and they do a tremendous job. Things just seem to be coming together pretty well."

Sherwin Dent, owner of Special D Meats in Macon, supplies the Macon and La Plata food banks with donated meat. This year, hunters who donated venison did not have to pay any of the cost of processing at Dent's company due to extra local contributions, but Dent said this price cut has not impacted the number of donations.

"Most people wouldn't worry about spending \$10 to have [a deer] donated when they've spent hundreds of dollars hunting already," Dent said. "Up until the last two years, [hunters] had to pay \$10 because the state wasn't coming up with as much money as they did this year, and it doesn't seem to make a difference."

Dent said his company processed 950 deer total last year, and that he expects a bigger harvest this year because the weather is more favorable.



Amy Vicars/Index

Top and above right: Deer meat is packaged and ready for distribution through the 'Share the Harvest' program.

Above left: Terry Morgan stands by meat he will process at his facility.

Bottom left: Morgan stands in his freezer looking at packaged deer meat.



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