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From: Clifford F. Shipley DVM, DACT

To Whom it May Concern:

I have been asked to opine on supplemental feeding in deer in North Dakota. For background about my opinion, I offer the following information. I am a cervid farmer currently in Illinois where I have raised elk, whitetail deer and mule deer for approximately 20 years. I am also a veterinarian that has worked on Cervidae for almost 40 years in many states and hundreds of farms. I have been asked to speak at numerous state and national meetings and hearings on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) as well as other subjects related to Cervidae. I am an avid hunter with over 50 years of experience with deer hunting as my passion. As such, I offer the following for your information related to supplemental feeding.

First and foremost, supplemental feeding is recognized as a major factor in keeping a deer herd healthy. Dr. James C. Kroll of Stephen F. Austin State University has written extensively about the advantages of supplementing deer. Increased body weight, decreased death loss, more fawns born and raised to weaning and increased antler growth to name some of the most important benefits. In times of drought, increased predator pressure and severe winters, supplemental feeding is even more important. Getting adequate protein, energy and vitamins and minerals are important to animal health and welfare. We do this with all other classes of livestock and many states allow it. In fact, a state like Wyoming supplemental feeds its elk herd while at the same time bans private citizens from doing same.

Most of the concerns about supplemental feeding are based on a couple of different concerns. First, that supplemental feeding increases the risk of spreading disease. To the best of my knowledge, only one paper (recent from WI) indicates that it may cause spread. In areas where deer feeding has been banned due to disease (TB) in Michigan, the disease has continued to spread. CWD has the same story in many states that ban feeding. Illinois is a great example of that. First "discovered" in 2002 in northern Illinois, feeding was been banned prior and since, yet the disease keeps spreading. What most people fail to realize is that deer are very social animals and as such, spread diseases the same as humans usually do, through close contact and shared items. In this case, deer share licking branches, scrapes, rubs, groom each other, lick and smell each other, mate with multiple partners and so on.

The second major concern relates primarily to "fair chase" hunting or more simply put, hunting over bait to draw the animal in so the hunter has an "unfair advantage. To cover this properly, I'd probably need to write a book (and several have) to fully address this. After 50 plus years of hunting around the world, I can tell you that each person, area, community, or culture have their own value system that has been dictated by a variety of factors. In some areas deer are driven and hunted by pushing them past hunters. Other areas primarily hunt over feeders due to the fact that you can't see into the brush and cover and it allows a hunter to be very selective about the age and sex of the animal. Other people tend to pass judgement over the way animals are hunted but have rarely ventured past the way they were either taught to hunt or read about. It has proven very hard to dictate moral values (in this case the way deer are hunted) in this country.

Last but not least, I would have you think about making criminals out of people that just want to help animals. Are we going to ban bird feeders, cover crops, food plots and more? The last thing hunters want to do is to hurt the deer population. They see this as a way of caring for the animals while at the same time harvesting deer to feed their families and manage the population. Feeding wild animals also creates a market for grain and supplements that helps to drive the local economy. Texas routinely feeds more corn to wildlife than any other state yet have a population of deer estimated at over 5 million and growing.

In short, I would summarize by simply saying that the scientific evidence strongly supports supplemental feeding. If at a later time, it is shown that it isn't, laws may be changed to conform to new evidence.

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