

RESOLUTION # 17

DEER IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURE

1 **WHEREAS**, an in-the-field analysis by Steward Green was recently completed to
2 estimate deer populations in eight study areas, encompassing more than 12,730 acres, or
3 approximately 25 square miles, in Atlantic, Burlington, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Mercer,
4 Monmouth, Passaic, Somerset and Warren counties; and

5 **WHEREAS**, that study conclusively revealed that there are, on average,
6 approximately 80-100 white-tailed deer per square mile in the areas covered by the study;
7 and

8 **WHEREAS**, experts agree that a healthy and sustainable deer population density is
9 far below what was found in the study, perhaps as low as five to 15 deer per square mile,
10 and;

11 **WHEREAS**, the severe overpopulation in the areas studied has led to “economic
12 loss from crop/landscape damage, automobile collisions, an increased risk of Lyme disease,
13 as well as the continuation of depleted habitats that threaten New Jersey’s forest lands and
14 other native wildlife”; and

15 **WHEREAS**, while the vast majority of crop farmers report at least some damage to
16 crops from deer browsing, a third of farmers surveyed by the New Jersey Farm Bureau
17 recently reported at least \$10,000 in annual crop damage from wildlife, primarily deer, and
18 five percent reported \$50,000 or more in annual wildlife crop damage, and a Rutgers
19 University study that targeted a smaller number of farms found similar statistics; and

20 **WHEREAS**, production agriculture farmers across the state are enduring
21 unacceptable levels of crop damage, incur out-of-pocket costs for protection, change
22 cropping decisions and also often have to hunt deer themselves on depredation permits in a
23 constant effort to minimize monetary losses from over-abundant deer, and the
24 overpopulation of deer in New Jersey also impacts the general public in the form of
25 increased collisions between deer and automobiles on the state’s roads, the destruction of

26 valuable home landscaping plants by deer feeding on those plants, destruction of understory
27 habitat necessary for other wildlife species, disruption of forest regeneration, among other
28 impacts; and

29 **WHEREAS**, there are 3,000 fewer hunters in New Jersey than there were just 10
30 years ago, according to the Department of Environmental Protection; and

31 **WHEREAS**, discussions on the subject have revealed that there is a lack of butchers
32 willing to do the work needed to make Hunters Helping the Hungry successful, and continued
33 funding in the State budget will help in recruiting butchers to do this important work; and

34 **WHEREAS**, a comprehensive, long-term, multi-species wildlife-management plan,
35 including not only the times when the farmer's crops are in the field but also when they are
36 not, with a permit worded accordingly, is necessary to help New Jersey's farmers plan for
37 and carry out a consistent, goal-oriented management of wildlife, especially deer, that
38 causes damage to crops and remains present on the farmland throughout the annual farming
39 cycle; and

40 **WHEREAS**, it has been the responsibility, for nearly a half-century, of the New
41 Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to manage the state's deer population, and
42 the failure to do so (as evidenced by the current extreme overpopulation) has created this
43 economic hardship for New Jersey's agricultural industry, along with the rest of New Jersey's
44 residents; and

45 **WHEREAS**, confidence among farmers in the NJDEP Division of Fish & Wildlife's
46 ability and/or willingness to confront the issue is running low.

47 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 107th State
48 Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, N.J., on February 9-10, 2022, do hereby
49 strongly urge that the Division of Fish & Wildlife continue to allow "baiting" with corn, apples
50 and other produce for the hunting of deer, as it helps to improve both the safety and
51 effectiveness of hunting in areas near residential development and provides a revenue
52 source for farmers and food retailers.

53 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the Legislature pass, and the
54 Governor sign, legislation amending N.J.S.A. 23:4-24.2 so that the Division of Fish and
55 Wildlife can make all decisions about baiting in order that it can be used as an effective tool
56 for the management of deer and other wildlife.

57 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we oppose legislation that seeks to prohibit “deer
58 baiting” by hunters in areas designated as “black bear habitat,” in part because the
59 legislation fails to define “black bear habitat,” leaving open to interpretation of the
60 Department of Environmental Protection what areas of the state in which someone could be
61 charged with breaking the law, as well as leading to a further increase in the existing deer
62 over-population that causes millions of dollars in crop damage a year.

63 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we demand the responsibility for managing the
64 state’s deer population be moved from the NJDEP and placed instead in the New Jersey
65 Department of Agriculture, which understands and will consider both the agricultural and
66 broader societal impacts of the deer population when making decisions about the
67 management of deer.

68 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support the expansion of wildlife damage
69 surveys and management plans for deer, as well as for other wildlife, for New Jersey, as well
70 as deer/wildlife damage research and education by the Rutgers/NJAES Center for Wildlife
71 Damage Control.

72 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the Legislature and Governor to
73 continue providing funding in the State budget for Hunters Helping the Hungry so that
74 venison gleaned from hunting can continue to be effectively donated to community feeding
75 organizations.