

RESOLUTION # 11

DEER IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURE

1 **WHEREAS**, deer continue to be among the most crop-destructive types of wildlife in
2 New Jersey with farmers reporting at least some damage to crops from deer browsing,
3 including a third of farmers surveyed by the New Jersey Farm Bureau reporting at least
4 \$10,000 in annual crop damage from wildlife, primarily deer, and five percent reporting
5 \$50,000 or more in annual wildlife crop damage, and a Rutgers University study that targeted
6 a smaller number of farms found similar statistics; and

7 **WHEREAS**, an in-the-field analysis by Steward Green to estimate deer populations
8 in eight study areas, encompassing more than 12,730 acres, or approximately 25 square
9 miles, in Atlantic, Burlington, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Passaic,
10 Somerset and Warren counties revealed that there were on average, approximately 80-100
11 white-tailed deer per square mile in the areas covered by the study; and

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

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

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

26 habitat necessary for other wildlife species, disruption of forest regeneration, among other
27 impacts; and

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

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

33 **WHEREAS**, the development of a commercial venison market and industry beyond
34 community-feeding programs such as Hunters Helping the Hungry would help spur additional
35 hunters and butchers involved in harvesting and processing deer for meat; and

36 **WHEREAS**, the New Jersey Legislature recently passed, and the Governor signed, a
37 measure that establishes a deer-fencing program and accompanying funding for non-
38 preserved farms, like the one that has existed for years for preserved farms, and that funding
39 is critical, given the significant expense of installing deer fencing on a farm; and

40 **WHEREAS**, that program has not yet begun to be implemented due to language and
41 administrative questions that lingered after it was signed into law; and

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

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

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

55 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 108th State
56 Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 8-9, 2023, do
57 hereby strongly urge that the Division of Fish & Wildlife continue to allow “baiting” with corn,
58 apples and other produce for the hunting of deer, as it helps to improve both the safety and
59 effectiveness of hunting in areas near residential development and provides a revenue
60 source for farmers and food retailers.

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

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

72 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge further funding to be approved by the
73 Legislature and Governor in the FY2024 budget for deer-fencing on non-preserved farms
74 (preserved farms already having a dedicated source of funding for that purpose) to help
75 farmers protect their crops from deer browsing and reduce the amount of accompanying
76 financial loss, and that we urge that questions surrounding the measure previously passed
77 for that purpose be addressed so that it can be fully implemented.

78 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support the expansion of wildlife damage
79 surveys and management plans for deer, as well as for other wildlife, for New Jersey, as well

80 as deer/wildlife damage research and education by the Rutgers/NJAES.

81 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the Legislature and Governor to
82 continue providing funding in the State budget for Hunters Helping the Hungry so that
83 venison gleaned from hunting can continue to be effectively donated to community feeding
84 organizations, and for the Department to work toward establishing a commercial deer-
85 hunting/venison-processing pilot program to demonstrate how a controlled reduction of the
86 wild deer herd can be an additional source of meat, specifically the development of a broader
87 venison market.