**RESOLUTION # 6**

**REDUCING BEAR DAMAGE ON FARMS**

**WHEREAS**, excessive populations of wildlife, and the accompanying economic and natural resource losses to farmers, livestock owners, homeowners, businesses and public lands caused by such wildlife populations, continue at critical levels in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, widespread development in New Jersey has led a variety of wildlife species to retreat to the relatively open spaces of New Jersey farmland and its appurtenant woodlands, infiltrating and feeding upon the crops farmers depend upon for their livelihood and that residents depend upon for fresh, nutritious, locally grown and produced foods, and risking the introduction of diseases common to wildlife into the domestic animal population and to humans; and

**WHEREAS**, along with deer, the species most often cited by farmers for significant crop loss is black bear, with damage from bear being most severe in the state’s northern and western counties, and ranging from “bear rolls” in corn fields to dragging away livestock; and

**WHEREAS**,the burgeoning black bear population, in particular, poses a threat to crops and smaller agricultural animals such as sheep, goats, and chickens - as well as to New Jersey beekeepers’ honeybee colonies that are vital to pollinating many of New Jersey’s leading produce crops and which account for a growing fresh honey supply - and these bears have increasingly come into contact with humans in residential areas, with multiple bear-human encounters reported over the past several years; and

**WHEREAS**, in an attempt to curb the black bear population, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Fish and Wildlife previously expanded the state’s annual bear hunt to include additional areas and the use of bows and arrows; and

**WHEREAS**, the 1999 Report to the Governor on Deer Management in New Jersey and the 2005 adoption of the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Strategy call for using hunting, among other methods, as a tool to manage wildlife populations; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2022, the annual autumn bear hunt was reinstated by the Division of Fish and Wildlife in New Jersey when Governor Murphy acknowledged the bear population had again reached critical levels after several years without a hunt; and

**WHEREAS**, while more effective in controlling the bear population in New Jersey than not having a hunt, there are several elements of the bear hunt as currently practiced that could be improved for our state’s farmers in trying to reduce bear damage on farms; and

**WHEREAS**, a comprehensive, long-term, multi-species wildlife-management plan, including times when the farmer’s crops are in the field and when they are not, with a permit worded accordingly, would greatly help New Jersey’s farmers plan for a consistent, goal-oriented management of crop-damaging wildlife, including fencing available from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA).

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 110th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2025, do hereby strongly urge that the Governor, the Legislature, the New Jersey Fish and Game Council and/or the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife and/or all other appropriate state, federal, and local agencies to effectuate the following:

1. Continue to support a science-based black bear management methodology that

 incorporates hunting seasons as needed.

1. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife stop the practice of pulling a depredation permit if the carcass of a shot animal covered by that permit cannot be found.
2. Support the expansion of wildlife damage surveys and plans for New Jersey, as well as wildlife damage research and education at the Rutgers/NJAES.
3. Allow “baiting” with corn, apples and other produce for the hunting of bear and deer, as it both helps to improve the safety of hunting in areas near residential development and provides a revenue source for farmers and food retailers.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support the ongoing survey work of Rutgers University to create a clearer, fact-based view of the state’s black bear population and its impact on farms, including the financial burden on farmers.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**,that we strongly urge the Governor and Legislature to support legislation that calls for moving the New Jersey Fish and Game Council and the Division of Fish and Wildlife into the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, creating a more logical alignment with USDA and its myriad of wildlife programs, and thus resulting in a better-coordinated effort to balance the needs of wildlife with those of the agricultural sector, provided that all concerns about such a realignment are addressed through a combined effort of the NJDA and NJDEP, with an eye toward accomplishing the missions of both departments.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge that the farmer members of the New Jersey Fish and Game Council, nominated by the delegates to this convention, be expeditiously appointed to that Council, as some nominated farmer members have waited years for their appointments to become effective.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we strongly urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife to broaden the allowed use of crossbows for use in hunting under a depredation permit, and strongly urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife explore the simplification of depredation permits and opportunities for sportsmen to be added to permits at any time, and for depredation reporting to be done with the automated check-in system to reduce farmer reporting.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife to correct the conflicts in the CBBMP that determines Category I bears, as all bears involved in any and all livestock kills should be designated a Category I bear, which will allow the Division of Fish and Wildlife to respond appropriately to agriculture bear incidents.