Hunters Helping the Hungry
Our Response to New Jersey Hunger and Ecological Imbalance

Tag Words: Hunger; Ecological Imbalance; Nutrition; Protein; Fat Protein; Processing; NorWesCap Food Bank; USDA

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Summary

The economic recession of 2008-09 has challenged food banks, shelters, and soup kitchens to keep up with increasing needs of those they serve. Challenges include providing high quality nutritional foods to people needing food assistance and protein rich foods are often in greatest need. Venison is a superior low fat protein source that is plentiful in NJ during hunting season. Hunters’ Helping the Hungry, Inc. (HHH) works to increase quality protein supplies to help the hungry in NJ through venison provided by hunters. HHH raises funds to offset processing costs that USDA certified butchers charge for processing venison. NorWesCap Food Bank—serving six NJ counties—distributes the processed HHH venison to organizations that assist the hungry. This Ethics in Science class project attempted to secure needed media and University attention to further the mission of HHH.
The Issue: Hunger

More people than ever are having to turn to food shelters to obtain the necessary nutritional food to feed their families thanks to this recent economic downturn. Not only have unemployment rates increased, so have food and utility costs, not to mention medical costs. With a high percentage of Jerseyans unable to pay their bills, mortgages, and also food costs, many are choosing to either purchase lower quality food for their families, or obtaining their food from food shelters, which are having a difficult time coming up with the resources to feed all of the hungry mouths at their door. According to the Poverty Research Institute, even though most of our families in New Jersey have at least one working adult, 20% still cannot afford to pay for both bills and food.

Food banks and soup kitchens often provide food for these needy families. However, most of their food is donated and therefore, the nutrition value is very limited and unreliable. Whereas one day, there could be canned vegetables, the next they are gone and replaced by fatty substitutes, which definitely fill the empty void, but do not properly allow for the growth of a child. Another way food banks obtain food is by purchasing discounted food using monetary donations. Often, this food is of a lower quality, especially in protein.

Protein is one of the most important nutrients to have in a diet, especially for a growing child. Protein is often found in most meats, as well as nuts and beans. Majority of the meat in a food bank is very high in fat content, meaning it is of a lower protein quality than we would normally recommend for children. Not only does this not help children grow, but it also worsens New Jersey’s obesity problem. However, venison is a healthy alternative to this protein meat requirement.

Wild deer are very agile, often competing for food and space, and therefore, also very muscular and skinny. Venison, the prepared muscle of a deer, is very low in fat content because fat deer equals slow deer equals dead deer. If we were able to provide quality venison to hungry people across the state, diets would become much more nutritious for these hungry people trying to live on food donations. The biggest problem with trying to donate venison is the packaging. Most food banks can only accept canned meat, to ensure that it has not gone through various damaging processes, such as repeated melting and freezing, freezer burn, and contaminations. Also, it costs about $80 to process a deer for the meat, and many hunters use their venison for their own families. (k)

A Citizen’s Response:

Hunters Helping the Hungry, Inc. (H.H.H.)

This organization was formed during the 1997-1998 hunting season by three hunters who were also concerned with the hunger issue in New Jersey. Since then, they have become a 501-c3 non-profit organization with a mission to provide food for the hungry using their hobby of hunting. Their mission statement is to provide quality protein for the hungry of New Jersey while addressing the overpopulation of deer in our communities. During the year, they collect donations from benefactors also interested in this problem. When the hunting season begins, they collect deer bodies from hunters who have excess, and send them to certified butchers for
processing. The processing of a deer costs approximately ninety dollars. Unfortunately, the collected funds usually do not last throughout all of the hunting seasons, meaning although there are more donations of food, they cannot be processed for the food banks benefit because there is no money to pay the butchers.

**The Service Project: Donations for HHH**

We started our project concerned with raising donations for the non-profit organization HHH. When we contacted HHH through trustee Jack Chellew, he suggested the best way to raise donations was to enlarge exposure for HHH—currently a major limiting factor in preventing HHH from achieving its mission and goals. If people do not know about the group and how they can help, their group’s mission will fail inevitably.

The first thing we decided to do was to put together a presentation for HHH to use during any future presentations. We constructed a PowerPoint slideshow including our input on how to help the hunger problem. We met with Jack on October 16th and he helped us review and edit the presentation to fit his needs. At this point, that presentation is solid on the HHH, Inc. information presented there. We are now working on adding updated research related to ecological damage of deer and environmental costs, appropriate legislative outreach for interested supporters to take advantage of (letter writing, calls, etc.) and costs and statistics related to vehicle damage caused by deer and mortality rates. We will be incorporating them into the Power Point and once they are in, Mr. Chellew, will review again. Once edited and we have our final, he has asked to allow his Board of Trustees to review the document before it’s presented in class and surely put on the class website.

Once this was finished, we wanted to connect HHH and Jack to Rutgers Against Hunger, the on-campus group dedicated to combat hunger. On November 11th, Suse and I met with Julie and also Dr. Larry Katz, the supervisor of RAH. The meeting went well and I do believe the relationship between the two will continue for future projects.

The next step we took to enlarge awareness of the HHH project, we contacted Rutgers Television Network (RU-TV). We wanted to film an interview to be aired on the Wake-Up Rutgers! Program live, as well as have it taped and provided to HHH for any future use. The filming was set for November 12th, but then RU-TV needed to reschedule and with Jack’s busy schedule, we were unable to set a new date on such short notice. We have been assured however, that this piece will still continue in the spring semester.

Lastly, as part of our responsibility to this course, we both wrote our own editorial letters to fulfill a requirement of this course. Thankfully, Kelly’s editorial was selected to run in The Daily Targum and could be read on November 9th, 2009. A copy of this article was provided to both RAH and HHH for use with permission of the author.

**Rutgers Against Hunger**

Rutgers Against Hunger (RAH), is a fairly new organization here at Rutgers University that allows the students, faculty, and staff to become involved in helping the hungry close to campus by donating food, money, and time to local food shelters and hungry families. RAH encourages
everyone to not turn a blind eye to the hunger problems surfacing in NJ, and is a great way to connect with the community around us, be it around campus or your own hometown. They are very flexible with projects, even giving ideas on how to start your own food drive or donation collection. This year, their main project is to advertise their Adopt A Family program, to help needy families get through the stressful holiday season. Last year alone, nearly five tons of food was collected and distributed to food banks around New Jersey—that’s 10,000 pounds of food!!

Legislative Actions:
In our power point we discuss one way you can help HHH raise awareness as being to contact your state legislators by sending a letter or email their way, informing them you’d like them to be aware of our hunger problem and how much we need the finding for HHH so we can increase the amount of venison donated. As a citizen of New Jersey, you can write a letter to either of our senators: Frank Lautenburg-[D] or Robert Menendez-[D] You can also write a letter to any of our Representatives. The state is divided into 13 congressional districts, each with its own representative for the House. This link identifies the districts, and according to where you reside, you can contact the representative in charge of your area.
On letter writing:
Each letter should address only one issue to be effective. All letters should be individually typed, not copied or a form letter. Be concise and state in the first paragraph your position on the singular issue you are writing about. A sample letter can be viewed on page 16 of the pdf file.

Ecological Effect of Deer Overpopulation:
Deer are naturally foragers. They eat as they roam over large tracts of land, making it difficult to confine them into an area deemed appropriate for them. An individual buck can eat up to ten pounds of food per day.

Deer are naturally a prey animal. In the wild, they have always been hunted whether it be by humans, lions, wolves, etc. This natural instinct as a prey animal has also affected their copulation tactics. A fully mature female under normal grazing conditions will breed twins or even triplets annually. When left unchecked, this means a small deer herd can double its size every year. It is important to make sure that we are constantly removing individuals from the population because otherwise our deer population would explode rapidly, leaving us with an extremely devastated ecosystem. The best way to keep the population down is to remove the larger and older females. The less females there are to produce does, the smaller the overall population will stay. Look at it this way. If you hunt males only, keeping in mind their trophy antlers, if you miss ONE buck, the entire female population will be impregnated by the singular buck you miss. So hunting for trophy isn’t the best way to manage a population, but every little bit helps.

The number of deer an ecosystem can maintain is called the carrying capacity. Because deer are constantly roaming for new habitat, they are very prone to overpopulation, which is also called exceeding the carrying capacity. This overloads the habitat they live in, causing the undergrowth to be severely damaged. Overgrazing can lead to an alteration of the density of food, the species of plants grown, and the distribution of plant species. When the deer cannot obtain proper
nutrition from their normal surroundings, they will venture into new territory, such as that nice green strip of grass separating the east and west bound lanes of a four lane highway, or into your front lawn.

To do nothing to maintain a deer population ensures they will continue to live at the highest threshold possible. This method leaves the deer in a constant state of poor health, having to share their food with so many others. This poor nutrition leads to a constant state of illness, and it has been correlated with a higher incidence of disease-carrying ticks. Other non-lethal methods of handling deer overpopulation include: barriers and fencing, deer crossings, repellants, and a slew of vehicle improvements. After testing, these methods prove ineffective for maintaining a lower size population. Barriers, fencing and repellants can lower the ecological damage to a specific area from deer grazing, but they do nothing to stop population growth. Our area is too heavily populated by humans to suggest beginning a repopulation of natural deer predators like wolves or mountain lions. Deer are extremely susceptible to trauma, and therefore cannot be successfully translocated.

**Conclusion**

This project was initiated in 2008 through Dr. Julie Fagan’s Ethics in Science class project, which identified the high and rising incidence of hunger in NJ, the existence of HHH and their efforts to assist the hungry of NJ, and the ecological impact of deer overpopulation on ecosystems, human health (i.e., Lyme’s Disease), and motor vehicle accidents. In 2009, a new student group continued the project and accomplished the following:  

a) Took the project beyond theory by meeting and working with HHH to make their mission and needs known to Rutgers Against Hunger (RAH)—with a resulting commitment to assist HHH in 2010 on campus and throughout the state food bank network;  
b) Compiled a Power Point presentation that describes NJ hunger, current status of impact of deer overpopulation, the mission of HHH and their strategy to address these issues, the 2009 project, and how individuals and groups can help through donations and advocacy;  
c) Strengthened connection of HHH with Dr. Fagan and Ethics Class for 2010 semesters; and  
d) Enlarged media exposure for HHH through print and possibly television and/or radio—with resulting newspaper articles appearing in Rutgers’s University *The Daily Targum* and local/regional newspapers and a future possibility of HHH being interviewed on *Wake-Up Rutgers!* campus television.
References

1) Hunters Helping the Hungry, Inc.: Jack Chellew, HHH, Inc. Trustee and http://www.huntershelpingthehungry.org/
   a. The official website of Hunters Helping the Hungry

2) Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Erie Insurance, Watch Out for Deer on Roadways, Retrieved 11/08/09 at
      i. Information from a NJ insurance company on staying safe while driving.

   a. Through the National Rifle Association’s Hunter Services Department, a “Clearinghouse” has been established to provide a state-by-state listing of programs that help coordinate donations of meat to hunger relief organizations, which has been obtained through hunting and processed by USDA meat processors.

4) New Jersey Deer Management Program: http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/deerbrf.htm
   a. Site contains information about the New Jersey Fish and Game Council and the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife Division and the areas of oversight they provide to management of deer and other forms of wildlife in the state. Specific goals and regulations for the New Jersey’s Deer Management Program are described as well as references to the economic value of recreational deer hunting in New Jersey and contributions of venison to food banks to assist those in need. Discussion is also provided about the importance of healthy deer herds is as this relates to a) revenue generation for businesses in New Jersey and b) environmental health concerns (e.g. habitat destruction caused by deer herds and “deer-human conflicts”)

   a. Link shows examples of sample letters as well as who and how to contact regarding legislative action

6) New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife - Hunting in New Jersey: http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/hunting.htm
   a. Site provides information specific to New Jersey hunting including: hunting regulations, educational seasonal date listings, educational programs, licensing, and related links to relevant to hunting and related environmental health concerns

7) NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife link to Hunters Helping the Hungry: http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/hlphngry.htm
a. Link provides introduction to Hunters Helping the Hungry, Inc., a brief history of the program and how to participate in the program as a hunter or make financial contributions.

http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/pdf/deer_mgt_options.pdf
   a. A large article detailing ecological damages due to deer and management practices that might or might not work.

9) NORWESCAP Food Bank Data from the Food Bank’s Southern branch and its Subsidiary Distribution Outlets: Mercer Street Friends Food Bank in Mercer County and the NORWESCAP Food Bank that serves Sussex, Warren, and Hunterdon counties. 2008

10) Penn State University Food Safety Educational Publication: *Venison 101 - Cut Identification and Cookery* 2008
http://foodsafety.psu.edu/Venison08/Venison%20101%2008.pdf


Dear Mr. Farmer:
I am a Rutgers University student enrolled in a Junior/Senior Colloquium: Ethics in Science class, offered through the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. My purpose of writing to you is to request the submission of the attached time sensitive editorial discussing how deer hunting can help address the hunger situation in New Jersey.

Due to the presence of appeals for canned and non-perishable food at many places in our communities; appeals for volunteers and/or contributions of food and monetary donations to homeless shelters and soup kitchens; the increasing presence of dead deer lying on the sides of our roads and highways from deer vehicle collisions; and many articles in the Star-Ledger and other high readership news periodicals about all of the above, I believe that the majority of your readers will find this editorial of a relevant nature. Your consideration of this editorial is greatly appreciated.

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*Note: Star-Ledger Editorial submission limit to 200 words
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Deer Hunters and Hunger in New Jersey

The economy has been rough on many low-income and working families. It has also challenged food banks, shelters, and soup kitchens to keep up with increasing needs, while also providing high quality nutritional foods to those they serve. As a result, protein foods, such as nuts, beans, or meat, are often limited in supply. Venison is protein source available at this time of the year.
Cited by many credible nutritional experts, venison is considered a superior protein source due to its low fat content and beneficial Omega 3 fatty acids and CLA. Hunters’ Helping the Hungry, Inc. (HHH) is a 501-C3 non-profit organization working to increase quality protein supplies to help the hungry in New Jersey through venison, while also addressing overpopulation of deer. HHH works to raise funds to offset deer meat processing costs, which hunters take to USDA certified butchers. The processed venison is provided to organizations, such as NorWesCap Food Bank, which serves six New Jersey counties. Hunters and non-hunters can help with this effort. Hunters can donate deer and non-hunters can provide funding to offset meat processing fees. Through education and outreach, there are year-round opportunities to help HHH help those in need. See http://www.huntershelpingthehungry.org/

Kelly Hansman  
Submitted to Rutgers University The Daily Targum  
The Daily Targum published on 11/09/09

This semester started out like all the other ones do at Rutgers University. I made and forgot my schedule long before summer vacation was written on the calendar. After summer ended, I once again packed my life up into plain brown boxes for the annual move-in bustle that was the beginning of my senior year. My schedule is plastered with electives and dreary classes that have nothing to do with my major. It’s filled with those classes that slipped through the cracks, making way for more difficult and challenging topics that actually pique the interest of a college mind. A three hour lecture on ethics was the last class I thought I’d actually enjoy.

So showing up for class on Wednesday morning with skepticism in tow, I sat in a dreary grey classroom. Our professor came in and told us we’d be having no tests, no textbooks. I was hooked. The first day, we watched YouTube videos about inspirational topics. This is going to be a cake class, I thought. Sitting here in my apartment, listening to the tappity-tap of my roommate typing away her third paper of the week, I can’t help but feel I’ve got it easy this semester.

Nearly eight weeks into the semester and my ethics course, I’m thinking how not easy this class actually is. One group project, on any subject, where I need to go out into the world and change something for the better is a very involved and complicated grade. I felt I would rather be saddled with exams and papers than go out into the real world. To make a change in society and have your name put on it for everyone to see if you fail, not just your teacher.

But that’s exactly what I did. I chose to work with the group Hunters Helping the Hungry, Inc. This group tries to combat hunger by donating extra venison to food banks and shelters. It was founded by a small group of hunters in New Jersey looking to make a change in society, just like our class was trying to do. They saw the hungry people standing in lines to get food and they knew they could do something to help instead of turning a blind eye to this injustice. Due to the current recession, paired with inflated expenses, more than 41% of families in New Jersey are making the decision whether to pay for food this month, or utility bills. This figure is from 2006, meaning that even more families than ever are having to turn to food banks to supply their nutritional meals every day. With the inflation, food banks aren’t getting the amount of food they need to feed all of the families coming in, and donations aren’t as high as they used to be because those who can afford to buy food are still having to cut back to pay other expenses, like gas, heat, and electricity.
Protein is the most important nutrient we need in our diets, and it’s also the most expensive to obtain. Found in meats, cheeses, and nuts, protein is necessary for healthy growth, especially in our nation’s future: children. Without quality protein, families are having to turn to more fattening and less filling snack foods, which are over processed and not nutritional. By donating an unused resource, full of quality protein, this group is not only trying to help the diets of families everywhere, they are also helping protect our state by reducing the deer population, which in turn will lower ecological damages, and save everyone from unwanted deer accidents.

Hunters Helping the Hungry can only do so much. Their funds are limited and processing deer safely can be costly. Currently, the butchers participating in cleaning and cutting the venison need between $75-90 depending on the size of the deer. Contrary to logic, the larger the deer, the less it costs, so hunters bringing in deer with the big racks save money and reduce the deer population by lowering the amount of reproductive males in the wild. To continue providing venison, HHH needs more donations so they can pay the butchers for processing. Talk to your local hunters about donating deer to this program. Donate money to HHH so they can continue to provide this necessary function in society. Write your local legislator about how important it is to keep your neighbors and fellow citizens from going hungry. Raising awareness of the hunger problem is the best thing to combat hunger.