



## Managing Deer Populations: Insights from the Pennsylvania Game Commission

To better understand how deer management impacts agriculture across the state, the Pennsylvania Soybean Board sat down with Tyler Strohecker, Landowner Engagement & Hunting Access Manager for the Pennsylvania Game Commission. In this Q&A, Tyler shares insights on current deer management strategies, future priorities, and what they mean for Pennsylvania farmers.

### What is the status of deer populations across key agricultural regions in Pennsylvania?

Pennsylvania is a diverse geographical state, so providing a simple answer to deer populations across several regions is challenging. With that said, the deer herd overall is strong, and we are working to reduce numbers in many areas across the state.

Current deer population objectives are to reduce populations in most areas of the state. (And an update to objectives for 2026-27 will be provided at the April 2026 Board of Commissioners Meeting). The Game Commission uses antlerless license allocations and hunting seasons across 22 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) to manage deer and additional harvest opportunities are available through various programs for agricultural properties.

### Are certain regions or counties seeing worse deer pressure on soybeans/crops than others?

Deer pressure is a concern across the entire commonwealth. Some pockets across the state that offer good agricultural ground coinciding with good deer habitat are currently seeing more significant damage.

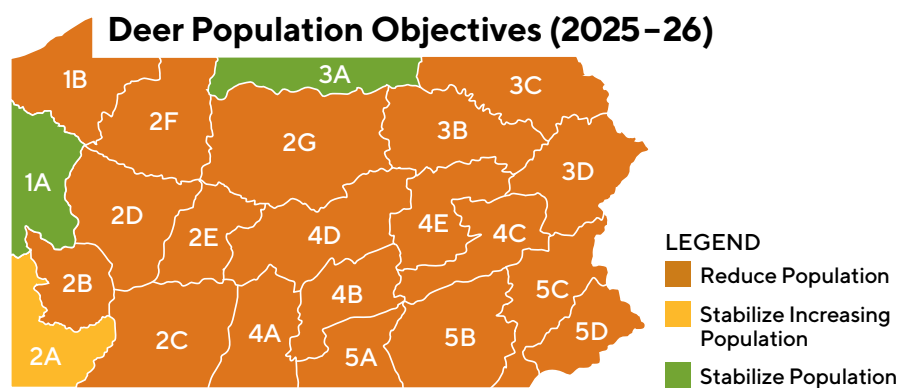
### What trends do you see in agricultural damage complaints?

We have seen a rise in issues relating to insufficient antlerless deer harvest. Landowners who are not taking advantage of our programs, or in some cases, multiple programs, are experiencing worse damage.

### What specific strategies is the Pennsylvania Game Commission using right now to reduce overpopulation?

The Game Commission manages deer populations at the WMU scale through antlerless harvest and seasons. Current population objectives include reducing populations in most WMUs.

Additionally, the PGC has several programs available to help landowners manage deer population on their properties. The newly created Certified Hunter Program has shown great promise in assisting our agricultural community with significant increases in deer harvest and hunting pressure. We've also expanded our Hunter Access Program to help landowners manage wildlife populations by expanding access for hunters. Those programs, coupled with use of our Ag Tag and Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), are currently being bolstered to assist with rising deer-human conflict.



### How does the Pennsylvania Game Commission work with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to address crop damage?

The Game Commission has worked with the Department of Agriculture to better understand the crop damage issues farmers are facing and collaborate on potential solutions. The agencies have partnered to host multiple town hall events, inviting farmers to voice their concerns, ask questions, and provide feedback on proposed measures to balance wildlife and agriculture.

### What role do local communities and municipalities play in deer population control?

Because hunting is the primary tool for managing deer populations, local communities can best play a role by facilitating antlerless deer hunting through increased access and opportunity as well as harvesting antlerless deer.



**“We have seen a rise in issues relating to insufficient antlerless deer harvest. Landowners who are not taking advantage of our programs, or in some cases, multiple programs, are experiencing worse damage.”**

### Are there trends or statistics that can show positive/negative benefits for farmers if the problem is already out of hand? How long does it typically take to get the population back in order?

At the WMU level, staff look at 6-year population trends relative to objectives to determine the level of antlerless harvest needed to achieve goals. Typically, changes can be detected in trends in 3-4 years at that larger WMU-scale, but localized changes can occur much faster depending on level of localized harvest.

At the agricultural property scale, localized deer population change is very much in the hands of the landowners and how many antlerless deer are removed from the property.

We like to have 3 years of data on hand to make decisions based on population. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how long it would take “to get the population back in order,” but an impact can be made immediately by increasing the hunting pressure and overall harvest on the landscape, particularly at the local level.

### Are there special permits (like depredation or agricultural tags) available for farmers experiencing heavy losses?

Yes, our Ag Tag and DMAP programs can have a significant positive impact on correcting wildlife management issues. Harvesting for crop damage and the depredation permit also allow for additional take.

### How does the Red Tag or Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) work, and who qualifies?

Landowners enroll in the DMAP/Ag Tag program and receive additional antlerless tags based on the number of acres they enroll. DMAP tags work like traditional antlerless tags, in that they can be used during overlapping hunting seasons. Ag Tags operate on their own season and can be used from August 1-April 15. All landowners can qualify for DMAP tags. Landowners that have agriculture as a primary source of income can qualify for Ag Tags.

### What options do farmers have to increase hunting pressure on their land?

Enrolling in the Certified Hunter and/or the Hunter Access Programs is the best way for landowners to quickly and effectively increase hunting pressure on their land and take antlerless deer. These programs can provide additional harvest opportunities (e.g., tags, seasons, firearms, etc.) beyond what is available at the WMU level.

### How will the deer population change, in the next 5 years, if nothing is done about the current problem. How will it change if farmers enroll in some of the new programs, like the certified hunter program?

Current objectives are to reduce deer numbers in most of the state, but the success of these objectives depends on harvest levels on the ground which can be impacted by lack of hunting access. If farmers fully utilize the programs available to remove additional antlerless deer, they can certainly begin to reduce deer numbers on their properties. If harvest levels are not high enough on a property and/or access restrictions prevent adequate harvest, then deer numbers may rise.

For more information, please visit the Pennsylvania Game Commission website link below to the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) on the Pennsylvania Game Commission website.



Tyler Strohecker  
Landowner Engagement & Hunting Access Manager  
Pennsylvania Game Commission



Scan here to learn more! >

## 2026 On-Farm Network Research Summaries from Penn State Extension

With funding from the Pennsylvania Soybean Board, Penn State Extension's Pennsylvania On-Farm Network conducts both small plot research at the Southeast Agricultural Research and Extension Center and larger scale, on-farm trials throughout Lancaster County. These efforts are designed to evaluate agricultural practices under real world conditions.

Working in close collaboration with Pennsylvania growers, the program validates research findings and ensures that results from small plot studies can be effectively scaled into practical, field ready solutions for commercial production.

The Soybean On-Farm Network engages farmers and stakeholders through various outreach methods to promote collaboration, address production and management challenges, and provide science-based insights to improve soybean production and decision-making in Pennsylvania. In 2026, they will host breakfast and lunch meetings, field days, and hands-on demonstrations.

### THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH INITIATIVES ARE PLANNED FOR 2026:

#### Predictive modeling to improve the quantification of losses due to deer damage in soybean production systems

Deer damage can lead to substantial loss in soybeans, although quantifying the exact loss can be difficult. Using in-field surveys, deer cameras, and satellite imagery across multiple fields in Pennsylvania, they will estimate the size of browsed versus unbrowsed patches within each field, which can then be scaled up to the field level. Cameras will enable quantification of deer density, which can then provide a framework for developing a model that farmers can use to study the relationship between deer density and yield loss in their fields.



#### Soybean sentinel plot program

By collaborating with local growers, extension educators will conduct weekly scouting of soybean fields and report the active plant pathogens, as well as insect and slug pests. This information will be published in Penn State's Field Crop News eNewsletter to inform growers about the active pests that may pose risks to their fields. To sign up for this free eNewsletter visit <https://extension.psu.edu/field-and-forage-crops-team-sign-up>.



#### Slug monitoring and phenology program

Extension educators will monitor several slug species in soybeans from early April to mid-June by inspecting shingle traps weekly for slugs and slug eggs. As soybeans start to grow, slug feeding damage will be evaluated. A weekly report will be published in Field Crop News.

#### Evaluating targeted spraying technology in no-till soybean

PSU Weed Science is working with early adopters of John Deere's See & Spray technology to characterize potential return on investment (ROI) from herbicide input reductions. Surveys and analyses will consider field characteristics (size, landscape features), weed distribution patterns (edge vs. interior), and weed species (life cycles, dispersal traits) that impact ROI.

#### Participatory on-farm trials will evaluate the effectiveness of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) fungicide applications

UAV applications are becoming more popular, yet many questions remain about their effectiveness against diseases such as white mold in soybeans. In replicated strip trials, they will compare spray coverage, disease severity, and yield across application methods (ground versus drone).

#### Plant-parasitic nematode surveillance

This project examines the distribution of nematodes in soybean fields. It seeks to correlate the density of plant-parasitic nematodes (specifically root-lesion and soybean nematodes), evaluate the connections between nematode density and above-ground disease symptoms, and investigate the relationship between nematode hot spots and yield losses.

#### Drone seeding cover crops into standing soybeans

This trial aims to determine the optimal drone-seeding dates for hairy vetch + tillage radish mix into standing soybeans. The fall and spring performance of three drone-seeding dates and post-soybean-harvest cover-crop seeding will be compared across six sites.



#### Production Agronomy: planting date, maturity group, and growth enhancers

This year, they will assess the interactions between planting dates, maturity groups, and yield. Additionally, they will use soybean variety trials to evaluate yield responses across maturity groups. Finally, they will investigate how foliar fertilizers and growth enhancers influence soybean productivity.

## Register Now for the 2026 Soybean Yield Contest and Download a Free Copy of the 2025 Soybean Yield Contest Report!



The annual Pennsylvania Soybean Yield Contest held by the Pennsylvania Soybean Board (PSB), is more than a competition. The data provided by the growers is used to create the *Soybean Yield Contest Report*, a powerful tool that helps soybean growers across the Commonwealth sharpen their crop management strategies to help maximize soybean production.

The state is divided into five regions, and the top producer in each region earns recognition and prizes, with one grower ultimately named the overall state winner. Bragging rights and awards add to the fun, but the real victory is the shared knowledge that benefits all Pennsylvania soybean producers.

There's no fee to enter, and we work hard to make harvest form submission simple and straightforward. The more growers who participate in the contest, the stronger the data and the more valuable the report becomes.

Registration is open now until September 1, 2026. For more information about the contest, a free download of the *2025 Soybean Yield Contest Report* and to register for the 2026 contest please visit the PSB website: <https://pasoybean.org/initiatives/pasoybean-yield-contest/>



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## Need Insight to Help Manage the Business End of Farming? Check out AgWorks

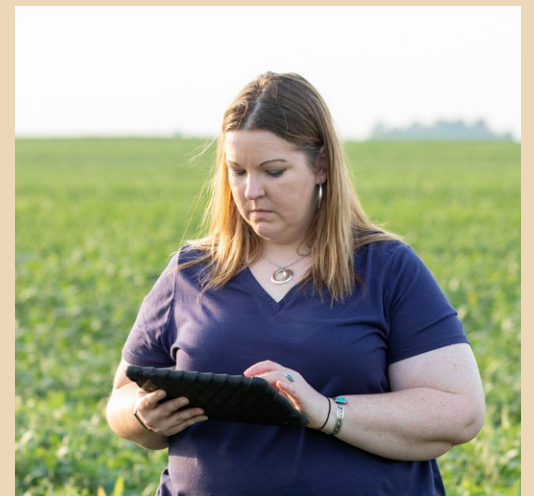
Started in 2025 and ending in 2027, Penn State Extension and the Penn State Center for Agricultural and Shale Law have collaborated with farms and agriculture-related businesses to strengthen the workforce system. The AgWorks program supports employers, expands opportunities for workers, and enhances employment conditions throughout the agricultural sector.

Thanks to an AgWorks grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, webinars on business related topics are open to everyone at no cost. Registration is required to view upcoming webinars, archived webinars and workshops.

#### Webinar Series and Workshop Series Include:

- **Hiring, Retention, and Human Resources** This series of 25 webinars covers what farmers need to know to build and foster a workforce.
- **Agricultural Law** As part of the AgWorks program, the Center for Agricultural and Shale Law is offering a series of 20 monthly webinars on the most important laws related to agricultural jobs and employment.
- **Business and Compensation** This workshop series provides practical guidance on the core administrative responsibilities every organization must manage. Topics include taxes, insurance, record keeping, retirement, and employee benefits.
- **Health and Safety** This series of workshops and webinars are designed to help farm owners, managers, and workers create safer, more resilient operations.

For more information and to register visit: <https://extension.psu.edu/agworks-calendar-of-events>



The Pennsylvania Soybean Board is a farmer-controlled Board responsible for managing Pennsylvania's share of funds received from the nationwide Soybean Checkoff program. The funding is available under an assessment program, approved by Congress in 1990, under which soybean farmers contribute 50 cents of every \$100 they receive for their beans at the first point of sale. Funds are used to develop markets, educate consumers, and research new ways to utilize and produce soybeans more efficiently.

Learn more at [pasoybean.org](https://pasoybean.org)



For the latest news, events, research updates and more:

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