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WANTED: Charitable Hunters

As fall arrives so does the time-honored tradition of hunting. Those who have been patiently waiting can finally celebrate the start of deer season. From the early settlers of our region, to the 350,000 plus individuals who hunt each year, hunting is a pastime that has been woven into the very fiber of West Virginia's heritage. Regardless if you participate in the activity or not, most of our state's residents have eaten a hunter's spoils. Ask any West Virginian and they will tell you hunting has made its mark on the people of the Mountain State. The same can be said for our aptitude to help West Virginians who have fallen on hard times. Mountaineers always shown they are quick to respond when disaster strikes. This year, we are asking all hunters to combine passion with charity by considering donating a kill to the Hunters Helping the Hungry (HHH) program. Let's kill two birds with one stone.

This season will mark the 27th consecutive year the Division of Natural Resources (DNR) has operated the HHH program. The program was established in 1992 and has been supported by the Governor's One Shot, Inc. since 2008. The Governor's One Shot is tasked with privately raising funds to pay processors to ensure there is no cost for hunters who wish to participate. Since its inception, hunters and participating processors have donated 25,702 deer towards the cause. What this means for our state is our two area food banks, through the HHH program, have been able to collect 979,549 pounds of highly nutritious meat for some of our neediest families. In terms of meals, we estimate 1,318,115 times a West Virginia did not go hungry.

As the Governor's One Shot continues their effort to raise funds, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) and the DNR are looking to match their commitment by expanding this already successful program. Our hope is to highlight a lesser known initiative, as well those individuals who make this program thrive. Beyond publicity, we know the HHH's reach is only limited by two things; deer donated and counties covered by

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a processor. If we can accept more deer into the program, as well as increase our ability to process those deer, we can expand HHH's mission. If we want to help feed more families, we need additional hunters and processors to step up to the challenge. Our effort is only limited by our manpower, a challenge other charitable initiatives know too well.

If you feel a charitable spark, here is how to get involved. Hunters who decide to participate in the program must take their deer to a participating processor. Once a deer is designated as a HHH donation, it will be ground, packaged and frozen. From there, the Mountaineer Food Bank and Facing Hunger Foodbank will pick up the venison and distribute it through their statewide network of 600 charitable partners. There is no cost to those hunters who participate. If you are a processor, you just need to reach out to the DNR and/or the WVDA and ask to get involved. From there, we can help those businesses work through the process of becoming a certified partner. Our agencies stand ready to assist those who wish to give back this holiday season.

To all hunters, we ask while you pursue your passion think about giving back to those who desperately need assistance. Not only will you be helping control the deer population, you will be providing a high quality, fresh food to families who may miss their next meal. Help us expand a program that is a clear win-win for our state. One more time, lets prove West Virginians will always step up to help our most needy; become a Hunters Helping the Hungry partner, today!

Kent A. Leonhardt
West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

