

# **FARMER ATTITUDES TOWARD WHITE-TAILED DEER AND OTHER WILDLIFE ISSUES IN OHIO: 2000 UPDATE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Michael C. Reynolds

A total of 1244 agricultural producers representing 4 regions and all 88 counties was surveyed for the Ohio DNR, Division of Wildlife's Farmer Attitude Survey in August 2000. The average farm size of respondents was 208 acres (median: 97 acres, range: 1 – 4500 acres) and income from agricultural production represented 31% of total household income in 1999.

Forty-nine percent of respondents reported some type of wildlife damage in 1999, much lower than the 82% of respondents that reported experiencing wildlife damage in the 1995 survey. In all types of agricultural production, damage was most often reported as light to moderate. White-tailed deer were perceived as causing most damage, except for vegetable crops in which other wildlife species were implicated. Damage occurred most often in summer for grain, vegetable, and fruit production, but most damage occurred in fall and winter in nursery stock and Christmas tree production.

Overall, 42% of respondents felt the deer herd had increased, 35% believed it had remained unchanged, and 20% thought it had declined during the past 5 years. However, responses differed between groups based on the occurrence of wildlife damage. A majority of respondents (52%) who experienced some form of wildlife damage believed the deer population had increased during the past 5 years. Whereas respondents who did not experience any wildlife damage were more evenly split as to the growth of the deer population. Thirty-two percent of this group thought the herd had increased, 39% believed the population was unchanged, and 25% felt deer numbers had declined in their county during the past 5 years. Respondents desired an average decrease of 9% in the deer population. Farmers in the Hill Counties desired the greatest reduction in the deer population (14%), followed by the Intermediate region (10%), the Northeast Metro region (7%), and the Farmland region (5%). The regional average desired change in the deer population was used to adjust county deer population target levels in each region.

Only 31% of respondents and an average of less than one immediate family member hunted deer on their own property in 1999. However, 57% of producers gave permission to others to hunt deer. Most producers felt that the number of hunters seeking permission to hunt on their land had remained the same (52%) or increased (21%) from previous years. Nearly 20% of producers felt that problems with deer hunters on their property had increased compared to recent years, but reported that most problems were minor.