



**MAKE FEEDING AND BAITING BAN PERMANENT,
STATE AGRICULTURE OFFICIALS SAY**

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MADISON -- Feeding and baiting free-ranging whitetail deer threatens the health of domestic livestock and wildlife, and should be banned permanently in Wisconsin, say officials of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

The Department issued a policy statement today in support of the Department of Natural Resources' proposed permanent rule, which will be the topic of a series of public hearings beginning March 17. Feeding and baiting were banned statewide by temporary emergency rule in summer 2002 in response to the chronic wasting disease outbreak.

But other diseases are of equal or greater concern to agriculture, says acting state veterinarian Dr. Robert Ehlenfeldt. "CWD threatens our deer and elk farms, and that is certainly a major concern. But there's a list of other diseases that can pass between free-ranging deer and dairy and beef cattle," he says.

Those diseases include bovine tuberculosis, bovine viral diarrhea, and brucellosis, along with less well-known diseases like leptospirosis, parainfluenza, pasteurellosis, and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis. These diseases can drastically cut production and damage the livestock industry's economic value. Some of these diseases also may threaten human health.

Other wildlife diseases could have a more indirect effect, Ehlenfeldt notes. For example, hemorrhagic disease virus in deer does not spread to cattle, but can induce an immune response that may cause cattle to test positive for bluetongue virus. That could close some export markets to Wisconsin cattle.

Feeding heightens the risk of disease exposure and transmission in several ways, the policy statement says:

- First, feeding increases the food supply and so, artificially increases herd densities above the land's natural carrying capacity.
- Second, it concentrates animals into small areas.
- Third, feeding acclimates free-ranging deer to mechanical devices, troughs, and other items used by livestock.

The first two factors result in dense populations that increase animals' direct contact with saliva in the air and on feed, and with infected urine and feces – all means of transmission for many diseases that may also infect livestock. The third factor makes deer more likely to approach livestock feeding areas. Again, the risk of disease increases, the statement says.

Baiting doesn't contribute as much to artificially high populations of deer, but still increases the disease risk by gathering animals over small feed supplies, according to the department's statement. One Wisconsin study showed that up to 35 deer from several family groups visited one two-gallon feed pile. Only a few deer may eat from the supply, but other inspect the area and contact saliva, urine and feces.

"Michigan found bovine TB in its free-ranging whitetails in 1994. Their natural resources and agriculture departments conducted research that showed feeding spread TB pretty effectively. When cattle herds started getting infected, they did DNA tests and found that the infection had spread from the free-ranging deer," Ehlenfeldt says.

"There are 26 infected cattle herds, and Michigan no longer has its TB-free status. That translates to decreased cattle sales, closed international markets and high testing costs for farmers to prove their herds are clean so they can sell cattle. And those 26 herds were killed. The indemnity that the producer gets doesn't make him whole, and those indemnity payments come out of public funds. We don't want this kind of scenario in Wisconsin."

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