Deer Programs to reduce tick borne disease and feed Islanders

After a successful first season, Island Grown Initiative (IGI), the MV Tick-borne Illness Prevention Program (MV Tick Program) and Martha’s Vineyard Agricultural Society (MVAS) are again collaborating to reduce the Vineyard deer population to both mitigate tick-borne illnesses and feed Islanders facing food insecurity. Adding to the urgency is the financial impact of COVID-19 which curtailed many Islanders’ seasonal work and is certain to bring a significant increase in families needing food support.

The Community Deer Cooler is at the MV Agricultural Hall, located at 35 Panhandle Road in West Tisbury. Hunters who register are welcome to hang deer from October 5th to December 31st. Drop off will be open from 8 am to 8 pm every day. Registration is required and the cooler will be regularly monitored by a trained staff member. The fee of $50 will be waived for those who donate a deer to the Venison Donation Program. Members of the MVAS can use the deer cooler for free. To become a member of MVAS, or to get additional information about the Community Deer Cooler program go to [http://marthasvineyardagriculturalsociety.org](http://marthasvineyardagriculturalsociety.org).

This will be the fifth year, IGI has operated the Venison Donation Program which is available to all hunters who are willing to share their harvest. Last season 22 deer were donated and resulted in more than 600 pounds of venison distributed to families through the Island Food Pantry, Serving Hands, Councils on Aging, Community Suppers and
other food equity providers. The venison is processed at The Larder under the supervision of Jefferson Monroe, owner of the Good Farm.

Deer that are donated and stored at the Community Deer Cooler must be field-dressed, skin on, properly tagged with the registration number written on the field tag, visible for inspection and attached to the animal. The venison is processed and labeled according to state and local public health requirements.

In an effort to reduce tick-borne illness, cull the deer herd, and encourage hunters to donate to local food charities, the MV Tick program is continuing its very successful pilot Deer Subsidy Program started in 2019. Subsidies are provided only to those with a Zone13 hunting license and valid only for archery and primitive firearms. The Permanent Endowment of Martha’s Vineyard will serve again as the fiscal sponsor and will issue $100 checks to qualified hunters for each eligible female deer.

This program recognizes that hunters spend resources and time tracking deer; the subsidy is meant to encourage hunters to take additional female deer. To fill out an application and get detailed information, hunters should contact the Deer Cooler Attendant by visiting the Agricultural Society’s website at http://marthasvineyardagriculturalsociety.org.

For additional background on the programs, please contact any of the following:
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