

**testimony by
Dan Fest
Cole's Nurseries
Bucks County, PA
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Good morning Chairman Hershey and Committee members. My name is Dan Fest and together with my wife we run Coles Nurseries. We farm over 500 acres in Bucks County. Before getting started, I want to thank this Committee for giving me the opportunity to be in front of you today and listening to our concerns.

We are a second generation nursery running a business my father in law – Kenneth Coles - started in the 50's while a student a Penn State.

As I am sure you are aware, farming is becoming increasing difficult especially in 'suburbia.' Although, in my opinion, our surrounding townships including Solebury and Buckingham work hard to support farming and realize it's important to the community and economy, there are many issues that we face that are out of our control.

One such issue is the ever increasing deer population. To put things in perspective, 12-15 years ago we did nothing to control the deer – because of the deer population and township terrain at the time; the effects of the deer damage were minimal. Hunting was more popular with ample ground to safely hunt. The open land and community makeup made hunting more acceptable.

Around 12 years ago we began to put plastic guards on whatever we could – however, for certain species such as those with lower branching and evergreens this is not possible. This effort has become increasingly expensive and in some of our fields no longer works. We have also embarked on a costly fencing plan.

We currently estimate loses of \$15,000-\$20,000/year due to the deer - bucks causing more than half. We also spend on average another \$25,000 on deer deterrents including fencing and guards. Fencing is not the answer – it only makes the deer more plentiful for the neighbors and ironically, fencing makes it worse for our other unfenced fields and those of our fellow farmers.

Horticulture is a \$5.6 billion per year business in PA. With the intense competition from other states we can no longer accept the losses. Our business is all about quality and our survival depends on it . Frankly the deer damage is an embarrassment.

Our friends in some of the more traditional farming disciplines are being even more seriously hurt- loosing total fields to the deer. Everyone is growing the same crops - driving prices down - and potentially damaging the soil.

I am here today as a farmer, however, I am also a father of three boys and a husband to a wonderful wife. Every night I worry about my wife as she makes the 5 minute journey from our office to our house. She calls me after she picks up the kids and when she gets home. The outdoors is something my family and I have always enjoyed but often I find myself discouraging them from a walk through the woods because of the high chance of lyme disease.

As a resident of a community I cherish, I worry about forest rejuvenation (or lack thereof) and the future of land preservation – why preserve if you can no longer farm the land?

I must emphasize that time is of the essence. We have been begging for relief for years now. We have received nothing but token gestures that, in addition to not addressing the problem, fail to show a concern and even understanding of the crisis situation we are in. In closing, I leave you with this thought: last summer 17 farmers sat in a room and discussed the deer problem. Four said that if something wasn't done in a couple of years they would be out of business. Without proper wildlife management, this is just the beginning.

Thank you.