

Donating hunter-harvested deer in Minnesota

Minnesota hunters can donate deer carcasses for use in food shelves and feeding programs. To participate in the program, a hunter must have their deer processed at a Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture registered meat processing plant. Only entire carcasses can be donated. Cut and wrapped meat will **not** be accepted. To participate in the donation program, hunters and processors must adhere to specific standards designed to prevent food-borne illness:

- Hunters must fill out a form indicating their willingness to donate the deer and their adherence to the field dressing procedures outlined in this brochure. Additional information such as permit area of harvest and MDNR number will also be collected for tracking purposes.
- There are no costs to the hunter for donating the deer.
- Processors will be reimbursed for each deer.
- Processors can only accept carcasses for donation that are:
 - Free from signs of illness
 - Field dressed with the hide intact
 - Free of visible decomposition or contamination
 - Properly identified with a Minnesota DNR registration tag
- Processors will reject deer for the donation program that appear to have been mishandled in any way.

Additional information about the program and a list of registered processors can be found on the DNR website at www.dnr.state.mn.us.

Venison donation and deer management

Throughout many areas of Minnesota, deer populations have increased to record levels. Over the past few years, Minnesota DNR has greatly liberalized seasons and bag limits to lower some populations. In some cases, it's working and in other cases it's not.

While DNR has been testing different regulations with the expectation that one will be implemented in the near future, we recognize that ethically, hunters will not take more deer than they can consume. Simply asking someone to take another deer to manage populations provides only half of the picture. The other half is developing a program that allows for the distribution of those extra deer.

The venison donation program was developed to provide hunters an avenue to donate, at no cost to them, the extra deer they harvest. Doing so has the dual benefit of helping to lower deer populations to goal levels while providing a highly sought after food source to those in need.

How to donate money

1. At the time of license purchase, all deer hunters will be asked if they want to voluntarily contribute \$1, \$3, or \$5 dollars to the program.
2. Anyone who is interested, can visit one of the 1,800 ELS agents and tell them you want to give to the venison donation program.

Guide to donating hunter-harvested deer in Minnesota



Proper Field Dressing

Photos courtesy of Digital Bucket

Improper handling of the deer can contaminate the carcass with potentially harmful bacteria and compromise food safety and quality. By implementing a few precautionary measures during field dressing, the hunter can help ensure the final product is fit to consume.

1. Place the deer on its back and spread the hind legs. Support the carcass in this position by using rocks or sticks. **All hunters should wear gloves!!**



2. Cut along the midline of the belly from the breastbone to the anus. Avoid cutting into the intestines and stomach by turning the knife blade up during the cutting process. Slowly remove the skin from the incision.



3. Cut through the sternum to open the body cavity surrounding the lungs and heart.



4. After opening the body cavity, reach inside and begin cutting the diaphragm, lungs, and heart away from the body wall. Remove the internal organs all in one step. Take care to avoid puncturing or tearing the stomach and intestines during this process.



5. To promote cooling of the carcass, place a stick between the ribs to prop open the body cavity and allow airflow.



Transportation and Processing

- Drag the deer with the back or side down to minimize contamination of the meat. If possible, drag the deer on a tarp or use a deer cart.
- Keep the carcass cool during transport to the locker plant.
- Transport the carcass to the locker plant as soon as possible. If the carcass cannot be taken directly to the plant after harvest, it must be stored at a temperature of less than 41° F.
- Rinse the carcass with cold water prior to storage to remove debris and bacterial contamination.
- When transporting the deer in a vehicle, pack the body cavity with ice to promote additional cooling.
- Allow for adequate air circulation around the carcass and keep it out of direct sunlight and warm temperatures during transportation and storage.

Proper refrigeration and handling is necessary to prevent decomposition of the carcass and minimize the growth of potentially harmful bacteria. This will reduce the risk of food-borne illness due to consumption of contaminated meat.