



Hunt Harvest

HELP



BY PAUL DAVIS

Like many of us, I can remember the day I harvested my first deer. It wasn't my first attempt at a deer – no, it was more or less the 5th attempt, and I am still reminded of that to this day some 20 years later. I had my fair share of missed opportunities. The first deer I ever shot at was with a single-shot .410, out of a deer stand with a buck standing at 10 yards. I was shaking so bad that there was no way I was going to make a good shot. Bullet went right over his back and my dad fired immediately

afterwards with his Remington Model 700 .280. It took a while for him to admit that I never came close to hitting that buck. A few weeks later my brother and father were determined to get me my first deer so we set out across the bottomland hardwoods, this time I was armed with a Remington Youth Model 7mm-08. All three of us were sitting at the base of a large oak tree when a doe pokes out 20 yards away. I have my gun on my knee ready to fire. Knees knocking and shaking like a leaf, I aim down the

scope...Boom! "Shoot again, Paul"... Boom! "Paul! Shoot again! Shoot!"... Boom! That deer was so frightened by the events that took place by that old oak tree that I am pretty sure she migrated north to the next county shortly thereafter. My redemption came a few days later sitting on a green field, the deer came out so quickly I didn't have time to shake or think about it. Aim then fire and just like that I had just shot the biggest deer that I had ever laid eyes on. As my dad is tracking blood I am following him



step by step picking up each leaf that he looks at inspecting it just to make sure he knows what he is doing. My father then stops and asks me to keep moving forward following the trail. Leaf after leaf the blood trail seems to grow larger when to my surprise I look up and see that my efforts have finally been rewarded and I see the world record buck that I had dreamed about since the day my dad told me I could shoot a deer. Anyone in the world was not happier in that one moment than either one of us as I held the rack of a

nice 8 point, it is a moment that I will never forget.

While my shooting has improved over the years (at times) and my shirts are not littered with notches taken out on the back there are still many lessons to be learned when it comes to chasing whitetails. They seem to be creatures of habit and taking advantage of such can lead to success in the deer woods. I have since switched over to my bow and with it a whole new learning curve. For me, it is not necessarily the deer I have killed or the ones that hang on my wall that stand out but how and why I go about it. The reason I hunt begins with a quick history lesson, back at the turn of the 20th century one of my ancestors was on a river boat and overheard two men talking of a large parcel of land up for sale. My great, great grandfather got off at the next stop, bought a horse and purchased the land before they arrived. This could be an old folktale where facts get cloudier and cloudier as time goes along. Thing is, my grandfather was a wise man true to his word and I am blessed enough to hunt on a piece of property that has been in the family for generations, so I take his word for it. I have made many memories hunting with my grandfather, my father, my brother, and the rest of our family. It seems that my fondest memories are when we were all together at camp sitting around a fire or celebrating success out in the field. I have always been taught to respect the game and to respect the land as it is a resource that we are given by the Good Lord up above.

The term, "resource" took up a whole new meaning to me as I took up Hunter's Harvest (HH) not too long ago. I knew other states in the country had similar programs, every now and then a TV show would

highlight a program and what it took to be involved. A quick research showed that hunters were making a real difference. Take what they have done in Tennessee for example. By the end of the 2016-2017 season the state of Tennessee had provided 5,361,308 meals since 1998. Let me repeat that...5,361,308 meals! That certainly makes the most out of a resource at hand.

A quick search on the internet and you will find that Tennessee has an approximate deer herd of over 900,000 while Mississippi has just over 1.75 million, so why is Mississippi's HH Program behind? Quick answer, Hunter's Harvest is still a young program. Long answer, I would argue that any hunter in Mississippi has at one point in time given venison away in hopes that the person receiving such would either a) take up deer hunting, or b) have a warm and tasty meal to enjoy for days to come. Since Hunter's Harvest is relatively new, not many people know that such a program exists. The program began in 2011 with just 7 processors and one central food bank that picked up the donations. Limited locations saw limited donations, but now the program boasts of 40 Processors with close to 50 food banks and shelters in the state that receive donated venison due to Hunter's Harvest.

It seems simple, Hunt – Harvest – Help. Hunting has been my favorite hobby to date and I have tried them all. Baseball, basketball, football, music, fishing – none of those things could outlast the effects that hunting has had for me. I wait all year for it in hopes for new adventures afield. Harvesting is part of the hunt and something that should not be taken lightly. Taking a life of a deer means having the presence of mind to respect the animal

One Deer Equals
140 MEALS
 You've helped provide
244,213
MEALS
 Thank you

Ways to get involved:

- * Give financially
- * Become a program sponsor
- * Donate a whole deer
- * Donate a portion of a deer
- * Help spread the word

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can help our communities in need. In fact, as of 2016 over 400,000 families were living below the poverty line which includes just over 100,000 children. These numbers coupled with the estimated amount of deer in Mississippi should pop out to us as hunters. There is room for sportsmen and women to make a difference. Through funding from private donors and large companies in Mississippi, Hunter's Harvest has been able to afford to take any donation at no costs to the hunter. It is easy as going on a hunt and harvesting a deer in hopes to feed a family, in fact one deer can feed over 140 meals. That one deer harvested and donated to a processor through the program can feed multiple families or even one family for one month!

As hunters in Mississippi we can make a real difference. I challenge each fellow bow hunter to help a neighbor in need and Take Aim at Hunger! Donate a deer to a participating processor and get involved. For more information about Hunter's Harvest and how you can be get involved please visit Mississippi Wildlife Federation's website at www.mswildlife.org/hunters-harvest or email Paul at pdavis@mswf.org.

and leave minimal waste. Helping is a term that we Mississippians know all too well. We are known for our hospitality and our generous

attitudes towards our neighbors. Hunt - Harvest - Help is the makeup of Hunter's Harvest. Hunters in Mississippi can make a difference, we

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