

Deer hunting season in Pennsylvania means food for hunters -- and food banks

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Darrell Sapp/Post-Gazette

Braydon Haun, Cory Tetzlaw and Mike Schmitt, all of Brighton Heights, walk out of the State Game Lands along Route 22 near Florence and Star Lake in Washington back toward their car for a break late this morning. Mr. Schmitt said they will hunt for deer till dark.

Once the hunt is over, the harvest begins.

That's where Kip's Deer Processing -- family-run since 1976 -- steps in.

Today, on the start of firearm deer season in Pennsylvania, it was "all hands on deck" at Kip's in Carnegie, said owner Kip Padgelek, 58, of Carnegie. There, hunters can bring in their bagged deer to be processed into items including venison jerky and Slim Jims.

Many hunters, who don't want any or all of the deer meat for themselves, still bring in their deer to be processed at Kip's, starting in early fall when the archery season gets underway.

"The deal is, they like to hunt, but they can't always use all the deer meet, and they want it to go to good use," Mr. Padgelek said.

The deer meat goes toward the Hunters Sharing the Harvest venison donation program, which since 1991 has donated about 100,000 pounds of processed venison annually to regional food banks in the state, which pass on the venison to more than 3,000 local food assistance providers, according to the program's website.

Last year, Mr. Padgelek -- a board member for the venison donation program and one of about 120 butchers participating in the program statewide -- sent 8,000 to 10,000 pounds of donated venison to Hunters Sharing the Harvest, which went to agencies including Light of Life Rescue Mission on the North Side and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

The venison donations provide a source of protein to people who are hungry, Mr. Padgelek said, and just one or two deer, depending on the size, can provide almost 200 meals.

He couldn't give an estimate for how many pounds of venison his company expected to donate this year, but he said workers were busy processing donated venison during archery season and expected to be busy during firearm season, which started today and continues for the next two weeks.

"I just hope the program never goes away," he said.

Information about where deer can be donated is available at <http://www.sharedeer.org/meat-processors/> Hunters are asked to contribute a tax-deductible amount of at least \$15 to the butcher to cover part of the processing costs.