

ORGANIC FOODS

James C. Kroll

Americans, and I suppose many Europeans, seem to be possessed these days by global warming and other environmental issues. My generation, the "boomers," really are obsessed with the environment for two reasons. First, when you dig into the underlying reasons, it often comes back to one thing: our own mortality.

We are feeling the dank breath of the "Grim Reaper" on our collective necks. Second, we have the luxury of time to consider such metaphysical concerns. There is a concept in social science called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. It begins with the very fundamental level of satisfying our daily needs for survival (food, water and shelter) and then continues upward to concern for self.

In much of the world, the average person spends every waking moment seeking enough food to stay alive; whereas, in the U.S. and much of Europe, we spend very little of our workday to put food on the table. The individual becomes less and less concerned with the needs of the body and more and more with higher order stuff such as, "Who am I?" So, no wonder first world citizens care more about their environment than third world citizens—we simply have the free time to worry about such things.

Whether it be concerns for living longer or for the environment, we cannot turn on our televisions without hearing something about eating and living healthy. Who ever would have thought so much shelf space would be devoted to trendy brands of plain old water?

My daughter is a practicing psychologist in Austin. On a recent visit to that metropolis, she took her mother and me to a trendy food market. Being a psychologist she understands me better than I do. Now, this was a place where you could see a vast variety of things, not only of foods but some really interesting people.

It was like going to a food version of Disneyland. It even was laid out in a maze of aisles each carefully funneling you past piles of exotic foods and drinks. Who would ever have thought you could make a soft drink out of carrots?

Since I really like wild mushrooms (not that kind), I stopped at a counter filled with every edible variety known to man. Pulling a paper (wouldn't want to use plastic) bag from a bin, I stuffed a handful of morsels into the bag. When we got to the cashier, the bag was missing.

"Where are my mushrooms?" I asked my wife, Susie. "Sydney put them back," she replied. It turned out they were $45 per pound and my bag would have cost me $18. My daughter is quite frugal. The truth was, almost everything in that place was more expensive than at Brookshire Brothers in Nacogdoches.

Now, what on Earth does this have to do with white-tailed deer? The reason food was so expensive at this market was not they were trying to rip us off. Rather, much of the fresh foods piled high along the aisles were "organic." To produce such foods, you have to manage less intensively and exclude intensive management tools

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DR. JAMES C. KROLL PHOTO

heart. They just need a little encouragement to realize their full potential.

I realize not all women are lucky enough to be born into a family that hunts, or is overlooked as huntresses because they have brothers. I was lucky enough to have a father who encouraged my outdoor senses, and never once was he concerned about my gender.

He began taking me fishing, and for a while this was fine. I soon grew restless, though, and yearned for something more. I begged for two years for my father to take me hunting. He taught me how to shoot when I was 8 years old and then, finally, when I turned 10, he gave in and took me to Texas. That was almost 10 years ago, but I can recall it like it was yesterday.

Experiences in hunting are moments you never forget. It grows with you, becomes wrapped up in your heart and never leaves. "A true hunter is a person who is a hunter in her mind and soul as well as in her heart." (Etling and Reneau XII) I love this quote because it describes me perfectly.

Even though not all women have the same opportunities I did, I want them to realize that they can easily do anything they set their minds to, especially hunting. It brings about so many gifts and skills to women, and hopefully my story and encouragement will motivate more women to get involved in hunting.

For the women who don't know where to begin, there are programs they can join to help them get started. An excellent one is from the National Rifle Association. They have a program exclusively for women called Women On Target™. It is designed to create more hunting and shooting opportunities for women.

They host women-only hunts, which helps inexperienced women learn the skills needed to hunt in any environment. They even teach the women gun safety and how to use a gun. This is a great place for women who are interested in hunting to get started. Any age is welcome to this program.

I like to see how women's programs for hunting are starting to emerge in society. It goes to show just how much times are changing, and how the face of hunting is changing also.

It is good for women to learn the skills of hunting so they can pass it down to their children. Hunting is a great way to spend time with family. I am so close to my family, and I believe it is because we all hunt. My father, mother and older sister all hunt. My sister is not as into it as I am, but she never misses the opportunity to come on hunts with the family.

We help each other out by offering advice and giving extra confidence. It is funny because my dad is the one who taught me everything about hunting, but I teach him a few new things every now and then. I have just started bowhunting, something my dad has never done. I think it is so awesome how I can teach him about this type of hunting.

I am always learning new things about hunting, and one day when I am married and have children I can teach them everything I have learned, and vice versa.

Hunting is not a sport for the weak-minded or closed-minded. It is also not just for men. Kathy Etling says, "Hunting and bowhunting are both sports that rely not so much on brute strength but on stealthiness, intellect, woodsmanship, perseverance and sheer physical endurance." (Etling and Reneau XI)

Women everywhere have the ability to hunt. Hunting should be understood as a whole, and not by only the killing part. Women owe it to themselves to try hunting so they can experience all the gifts it has to offer. Huntresses are like no other people in the world; they are truly a rare and lucky breed.

Editor's Note: Works cited for this article: 1) Kathy Etling; Susan Campbell Reneau. "The Thrill of the Chase." California: Safari Press Inc., 2004. 2) National Rifle Association. "Women's Programs." 19 Mar 2006. http://www.nrahq.org/women/wot.asp.



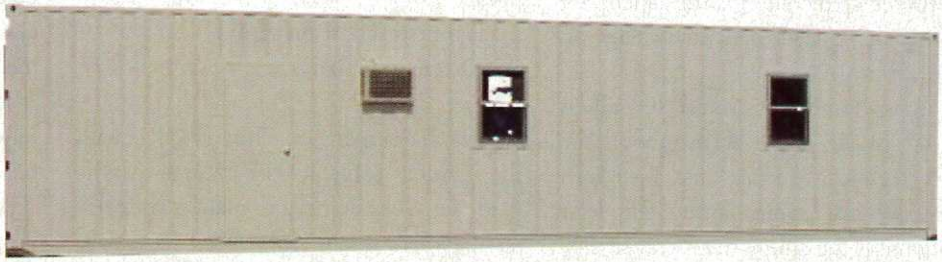


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such as herbicides, pesticides and irrigation.

The cost of eating presumed healthier foods was quite high. The folks who shop there, as it turns out, generally are affluent either monetarily or in lifestyle; they can afford to eat organic. That precisely is what we are dealing with in the debate about how deer should be managed.

In earlier columns, I often have expressed concern about what is happening with rural land and the rural lifestyle. Two facts are clear. The day is gone when you can make a living farming or ranching; and, the family farm or ranch is being broken into smaller and smaller pieces (fragmentation).

One salvation to at least slowing this trend is hunting. There is a demand for exclusive access to hunting and fishing, manifested either in leasing or package hunts. I was honored recently to speak at the King Ranch's annual lessee meeting.

It was interesting to hear from folks such as game biologist Mickey Hellickson that hunting (quail, deer, nilgai and turkey) is now considered with cattle and horses as a major source of income for the ranch. So, even historic ranches depend heavily on hunting for income.

The King Ranch is almost a million acres—a special case. What about the 1,200 acres near Cotulla that has been ranched by the same family for four generations? Is the family rich because they own this much land?

The answer could be yes if they sold the property to someone wanting a recreational ranch. Or, they may have oil wells. But, what if the family wants to maintain their historic, rural lifestyle? I remember a time when a person was referred to as "land poor," meaning they had a lot of land but barely eked a living from it. Let's examine what can and cannot be done.

There are purists who think deer management should be extensive in nature. The landowner should live within the limitations of his land. Unfortunately, this is a philosophy shared by those who can afford to do so; their living comes from another source.

As with the shoppers at the Austin food market, they have the luxury of not worrying about the price. This make believe world is also populated by folks who make their living re-enforcing this philosophy. These folks include academicians, agency biologists and consultants. "I don't think it is right for someone to profit from wildlife," a fellow biologist once told me. "Do you work for free?" was my reply.

It seemed it was alright for him to make a living from wildlife, but not the unwashed public. We cannot have it both ways. Either we want landowners to profit from their wildlife crop or we do not. Even Aldo Leopold felt private landowners would eventually reap financial rewards from their wild animals.

Let's take the above 1,200-acre ranch as an example. Ask a South Texas biologist how to manage such a ranch and he probably will tell you to do the following:

- Remove cattle.
- Leave as much brush as you can.
- Keep the deer herd at or below native carrying capacity.
- Do not feed your deer or plant food plots.
- Do not control predators.
- Do not high fence.

What he is saying, in effect, is to live with the natural (organic) limitations of the land. Yet, does he have to make a property tax payment each year? Does his salary fluctuate with rainfall? And, is there any personal consequence for failure?

How much money do you need to earn annually to have a reasonable lifestyle—$20,000, $50,000 or $100,000? There are two ways to earn income from hunting: wholesale and retail. The wholesale approach is leasing. We are now seeing lease fees upwards of $12 per acre in South Texas.

Unless my math is faulty, that rate will generate our family $14,400. Taxes are $3 per acre, so we have to subtract $3,600, netting $10,800 before other expenses. Obviously, that will not work, so let's try the retail approach.

Retail in this case refers to selling package hunts. The amount that can be made is related directly to the quality of bucks on the property. I am not interested in the argument we place too much emphasis on trophy bucks, reality is reality. You are not going to change it.

My studies indicate there are markets for two types of bucks: trophies and management. No one has done a better job at marketing these two types of hunts than Bill Grace at Mustang Creek Ranch. Over the last 10 years, he has managed to increase the quality of both trophy and management bucks to the point he has no problem selling his hunts.

I cannot tell you how much he charges, but I can give you the average price being paid in Texas today. Hunts for trophy bucks (150-plus Boone and Crockett) range from $4,500 to $10,000; while management buck (less than 150 B&C) hunts range $1,500 to $2,500. Cull buck hunts (less than 120 B&C), at best, are worth $750. Obviously, the more trophy hunts you sell, the more money you make.

Under extensive management, the general recommendation is to maintain no more than an adult deer to 20 acres in South Texas and 10 acres in the Hill Country. In our South Texas example, that means an adult population of 60 animals. It is also common wisdom to keep a sex ratio of 1:2, so that means our landowner has about 20 antlered bucks.

Additional "wisdom" is that you can kill 20-25 percent of the bucks annually (at the most five bucks). My data supports a distribution of 15 percent trophy, 45 percent management and 40 percent cull bucks under this type of management. So, using the minimum values given above, we have a potential extensive management income of $3,375 (trophy), plus $3,375 (management), plus $1,500 (culls), or a total of $8,250.

Oops! Turns out it is better just to lease the place and forget about managing your deer under extensive management. Even if you are commanding the highest prices, the gross earnings would be $14,625. Again, not really worth the extra effort.

If, however, we do the unthinkable and manage the ranch intensively, we can at

least double the productive capacity of the property with little effort. Also, my data show under such a management program you can alter the distribution of bucks to 25 percent trophy, 60 percent management and 15 percent cull bucks. That means the owner could produce annually 10 bucks for hunting.

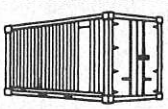
Again, using the lowest valuation the income from this scenario would be $11,250 (trophies), $9,000 (management) and $1,125, or a total of $21,375. In reality, under intensive management, five percent of the bucks would be classified as high value bucks, increasing the potential income to about $25,000. Add in a high fence, and the amount begins to represent a respectable return.

Yet, under any scenario you have to own the land first to generate any profit. That is why the owner also has to use integrated, multiple-use management from more than one source to justify keeping the property. So, the next time you think your rancher is making money "hand over fist" from you, give it a second thought. You, not he, are the one getting the good deal.

Bill Grace's ranch near Salado is now surrounded by developments, selling for as much as $15,000 per acre. Fortunately, he and his family are able to justify hanging onto their 2,500-acre ranch because they are making a profit from their wildlife. Yes, he could sell the property and live in some exotic place the rest of his life, but being able to economically justify continued ownership is all his family needs.

As a college professor, I am well aware wildlife curricula seldom include economics. I tell my students landowners always ask two embarrassing questions: How much will it cost and what am I going to get back for it? The correct answer never is, "It's the right thing to do." The right thing for whom? That is why, unfortunately, we tend to focus our professional efforts on those who can afford to eat organic.

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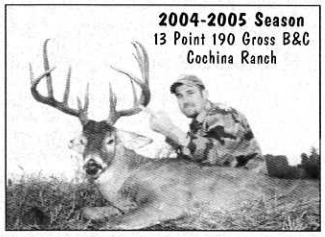


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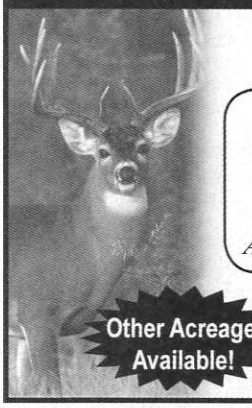
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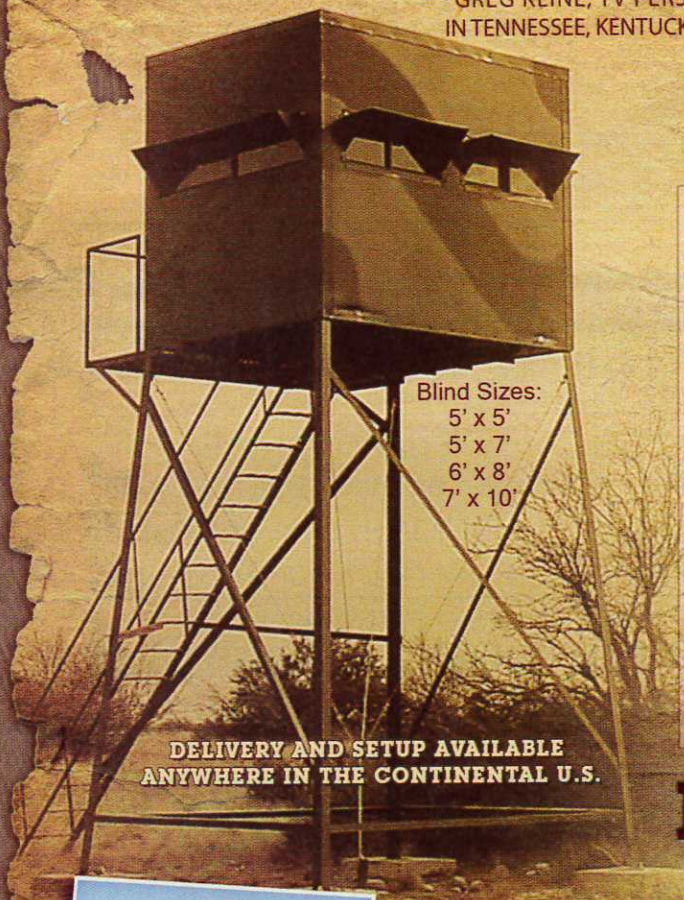
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