



UNIVERSITY of HAWAII at MĀNOA

HUMAN NUTRITION, FOOD AND ANIMAL SCIENCES

COLLEGE OF TROPICAL AGRICULTURE AND HUMAN RESILIENCE

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Updated November 24, 2025. Updates: Fixed typos and clarified that capacity was on annual amount unless otherwise stated.

Updated Report for **Act 54, SLH 2023** (HB1382 HD2 SD1 CD1) - Meat Processing task force to create and implement a master plan to expand meat processing capacity to allow axis deer and other wild game to be processed. Preliminary Qualitrics survey data.

Introduction

A 2020 study estimated statewide food insecurity at 22%, with the highest rate in Hawai'i County at 31% ([Stupplebeen et al., 2020](#)). Statewide distributors such as the Hawai'i Food Bank and its affiliates worked to reduce food insecurity, distributing more than 17.7 million meals in the 2024 fiscal year and serving an average of 154,000 people on O'ahu and Kaua'i ([Hawaii Food Bank Annual Report, 2024](#)). Despite these efforts, families continue to cite rising food prices as a key driver of need. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Consumer Price Index for food increased by 4.2% from 2024 to 2025, reflecting a steady rise in the cost of food ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025](#)). The State of Hawai'i, under Act-054, has recognized the need to expand protein donation capacity to feed local under-resourced populations.

Wild game represents a unique protein source, and its donation could provide a beneficial outlet for meat harvested from invasive species. Hawai'i currently has seven legally hunted game mammal species, although exact population sizes are unclear due to ongoing eradication efforts ([Department of Land and Natural Resources, n.d.](#)). Recent modeling and drone surveys estimate approximately 12 axis deer per square mile in Maui County, or equivalent to roughly 10,000 animals. Axis deer and other game mammals are heavily overpopulated, causing significant damage to private agricultural lands, degrading ecosystems, and reducing native species diversity ([Swette Center, 2024](#)). Utilizing these could address the need for increased protein donation and alleviate their effects on native ecosystems.

However, existing State of Hawai'i law, HB1334 HD1, exempts the donation and distribution of wild game meat or meat products by any organization ([Relating to Meat Donation, 2025](#)). Amendments to these laws in other states made game meat eligible for donation. Utah passed HB0142, which established conditions permitting game meat donations. The law specifies that a licensed hunter must take the game lawfully. Donated game meat must come from an animal in apparent good health before harvest, have intact intestines, and be field-dressed immediately after harvest. From there, the carcass must be processed as soon as possible, with markings stating "not for sale" and "donated wild game meat" ([Department of Natural Resources, n.d.](#)). Other states,

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such as Michigan, donate game meat through facilitated programs like “The Hunters Feeding Michigan Program”, which allows hunters to donate venison to specific processors as long as the venison was legally harvested, reported, and submitted as a whole carcass ([Department of Natural Resources, n.d.](#)). Wisconsin implemented similar programs and encourages additional food-safety practices when dropping off carcasses for donation ([Wisconsin’s Deer Donation Program | Wisconsin DNR, n.d.](#)).

To understand the feasibility of implementing similar game meat donation programs in Hawai‘i, this project aims to collect community feedback via an online survey. Specifically, the survey seeks to gather information on the current practices of food distributors, hunters, and slaughterhouses/butchers when processing or accepting game meat, as well as to determine what additional support these entities would require to provision wild meat to under-resourced communities successfully.

Methods and Materials

The survey consisted of 75 questions, including both multiple-choice and open-ended items. Introductory questions sorted respondents into categories by how they identified as a food distributor, hunter, or slaughterhouse/butcher. This allowed respondents only to answer questions that applied to their category. Some questions had options to specify, allowing respondents to elaborate on their initial response. Participants were allowed to skip questions once they identified as one of the categories mentioned above, ensuring that the survey process was non-invasive and allowed for more accurate responses.

Before distribution, conversations were held with stakeholders to ensure survey questions would gather relevant information. Once feedback was received, the survey was distributed through multiple channels to ensure all potential respondents were reached. The primary means of communication was emails through relevant organizations and listservs.

Data Collection

The survey was hosted using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Inc., 2025). To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, survey responses were kept anonymous, and emails for incentive distribution were not linked to individual responses. Response data was downloaded weekly for two months and stored as an Excel spreadsheet until analysis could be completed. This method allows for continuous monitoring and organized data reporting. This survey was open from May 5th, 2025 (05/05/2025) to July 7th (07/07/2025) for a total of nine weeks.

Preliminary Survey Results

A total of 100 responses were recorded during the monitoring period; however, only 88 responses were considered valid, as they had answered at least one question. Survey responses were categorized into four groups: Demographic and General Questions, Food Distributors, Hunters, and Slaughterhouses/Butchers.

General

The first section of the survey was used to collect demographic information and sort respondents based on their status as a food distributor, hunter, or slaughterhouse/butcher. When respondents identified themselves in one of these categories, they answered questions that only applied to their status. All respondents were required to answer demographic questions. Demographic information

showed that 79.5% of respondents identified as male, and 19.3% identified as female. 70.4% of respondents identified as non-Hispanic or Latino, 7.4% identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 12.3% preferred not to identify. Additionally, 19.3% of respondents identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 19.3% identified as Asian, and 37.5% identified as White. The remaining respondents, identified as belonging to two or more races, accounted for 18.2%, or preferred not to say, 5.7%.

Demographic Questions			
Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent
Please indicate your gender.	Male	70	79.5%
	Female	17	19.3%
	Prefer not to say	1	1.1%
Please indicate your ethnicity.	Hispanic or Latino	6	7.4%
	Non-Hispanic or Latino	57	70.4%
	Prefer not to say	10	12.3%
	Other	8	9.9%
Please indicate your race. ^a	White	33	37.5%
	Asian	17	19.3%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	17	19.3%
	Two or more races	16	18.2%
	Prefer not to say	5	5.7%
Please select the following that best describes you. ^a	Food Distributor	12	12.8%
	Hunter	73	77.7%

Table 1. Summary of demographic identification made by respondents, including their status as a Food Distributor, Hunter, or Slaughterhouse/Butchery. *Respondents can select more than one option

In addition to demographic information, respondents were asked to state their support of state-awarded contracts to companies that were experienced in processing wild game for human consumption. 64.3% of respondents supported these contracts, while 21.4% indicated that they might support, with 14.3% showing no support. Of those who did not support state-awarded agreements, two primary factors contributed to their response. Respondents indicated a strong preference for local companies over outside entities, including services provided by local hunters. Concerns were also noted regarding the classification of species as 'wild game,' with animal origin cited as an important consideration.

Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions as to how the state can support/provide wild game meat for human consumption. Their answers fell into a series of broad topics: processing, training and certification, regulation, game management, and commercialization versus community. Respondents emphasized the need for additional processing and storage capacity, including state-funded facilities, mobile units, certified kitchens, refrigeration, and waste disposal areas. Additionally, respondents emphasized the value of formal training and educational opportunities. Their suggestions included classes, workshops, and certifications for hunters and butchers, with some recommending incentives or education-based programs to promote safe meat handling. For those who raised concerns regarding regulations, many cited limited inspector availability and restrictive regulations. Respondents' recommendations included hiring more inspectors, easing requirements, and creating streamlined inspection pathways for game meat processing. Furthermore, several respondents stressed the importance of a comprehensive game management plan, regulated hunts, and partnerships with landowners to address nuisance species. Overall, many supported processing to improve food access. Still, others strongly opposed commercialization, emphasizing wild game as a community food resource rather than a source of profit for contracted companies or organizations.

Food Distributors

Twelve (12) respondents identified as food distributors, comprising 12.8% the total respondents. Respondents were asked a total of sixteen (16) questions, varying from multiple choice, select all that apply, and short responses. These questions asked about distributor characteristics, protein donation trends, current or potential roadblocks to distributing game meat, and suggestions for state-supported programs. When asked about interest in the proposed program, 80% of respondents supported, and 20% did not support.

Distributor Characteristics

Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent
Which islands do you distribute food to? ^a	Hawai‘i Island - East	2	11.8%
	Hawai‘i Island - West	2	11.8%
	Maui	4	23.5%
	Lana‘i	1	5.9%
	Moloka‘i	3	17.6%
	Kaua‘i	2	11.8%
	O‘ahu	3	17.6%
What communities do you serve? ^a	Un-housed	4	15.4%
	Food Banks	6	23.0%
	Low Income	8	30.7%
	Food Insecure	7	26.9%
	Working Class	1	4.0%
Please provide your annual distribution capacity for wild game in pounds	Average	95,800 lbs	
	Minimum	100 lbs	
	Maximum	500,000 lbs	
	Total Capacity	670,600 lbs	

How many people does your organization currently serve?	Average	74,716
	Minimum	15
	Maximum	1,000,000
	Total Served	1,223,015

Table 2. Summary of quantifiable food distributor characteristics. *Respondents can select more than one option.

Distributors reported that food distribution was generally uniform across the islands, ranging from 11% to 17%, with the exceptions of Lana‘i, which was below average, and Maui, which was above average. The top reported communities served were low-income (30.7%), food insecure (26.9%), and food banks (23%). Six distributors reported serving an average of 74,716 people, for a combined total of 1,223,015 individuals. Additionally, seven distributors provided their annual capacity for wild game distribution, with an average of 95,800 pounds and a total capacity of 670,600 pounds.

Protein Donation Trends				
Question	Responses	n	Percent	Comments
Based on your experience with the communities you work with, are they willing to accept wild game protein for consumption?	Yes	9	90%	-
	Maybe - If maybe, please specify in the space below what obstacles you believe prevent them from accepting wild game protein.	1	10%	Wild game protein, including Axis deer and feral hogs, is likely to be welcomed on Kaua‘i if processed safely and shared with cultural sensitivity.
Have you previously donated meat to any organizations?	Yes	4	40%	-
	No	6	60%	-
Have you previously received meat as donations to distribute?	Yes - If yes, please specify in the space below, the frequency you receive meat as a donation.	4	40%	Respondents have successfully received and distributed Axis deer from Maui Nui Venison in compliance with food safety standards, and would welcome

				expanded wild game donations if regulations allow.
	No	6	60%	-
If you have previously distributed protein sources, please indicate the recipients and the frequency of your donations.	Yes, I have previously distributed protein sources.	5	62.5%	Respondents distributed protein, including Axis deer and Maui Cattle beef, to partner agencies, schools, seniors, and emergency food hubs, increasing frequency during crises to meet community needs.
	No	3	37.5%	-

Table 3. Summary of protein distribution trends among food distributors. Comments in this table were summarized based on respondents' elaboration of the corresponding response.

Further questions sought to determine the organization's willingness to accept non-USDA-inspected protein, the organization's preference for protein distribution, and the community's willingness to accept game protein. Organizations emphasized the need for strict food safety processes, noting potential liability protection for organizations that distribute non-inspected products. Most expressed support for wild game distribution if animals were processed at state-inspected facilities with documentation, labeling, and clear traceability. When asked about ideal game meat packaging, responses showed a preference for small units, vacuum-sealed packaging, and ground meat. Most respondents indicated that 1-2 lbs of vacuum-sealed ground products would be ideal for large-scale distribution due to household needs and logistics. 90% of respondents believed the communities they served would be willing to accept wild game protein for consumption. While one respondent detailed hesitancy with public acceptance, citing proper education and communication as the key to ensuring community acceptance.

Respondents were asked to specify state or local regulations that would affect the donation or distribution of wild game. 70% were aware of rules, while 30% were not. Based on respondents' knowledge, the processing and distribution of wild game protein in Hawai'i are subject to multiple regulatory requirements from federal entities such as the FMIA and FSMA, and state agencies, including the Department of Health and Environmental Services, which oversee waste management and permitting. USDA and HDOA regulations further require licensed inspectors, humane harvest, and proper packaging and labeling. At present, wild game use is restricted to personal consumption and cannot be distributed for sale or donation. Respondents indicated a willingness to comply with these regulations. Several supports were identified, such as streamlined permitting, direct coordination with waste management regulators, and funding to manage byproducts. Additional recommendations included clear state guidance on legal requirements, partnerships with certified processors, liability protections, training on food safety, and grants for cold storage. Tools for tracking and traceability, along with oversight and assistance from state

agencies, were also viewed as essential. Existing models, such as Maui Nui Venison’s donation program, were noted as potential resources.

Respondents were further asked to identify the challenges they foresee with distribution and how the state can provide. Several respondents noted challenges in regulatory compliance, cold chain management, limited rural refrigeration, transport timing, and community acceptance of wild game. While others reported no issues, citing sufficient cold storage, transport, and safety protocols already in place. Suggestions for support included regulatory guidance and streamlined processes, funding for cold storage and infrastructure upgrades, transportation and logistics support, expanded local processing capacity, and public education to increase acceptance of wild game. Additional suggestions included capital improvement grants, shared storage facilities, and policy measures to reduce liability. 55.6% of respondents indicated that fiscal incentives would encourage participation in a wild game program.

Hunters

Seventy-three (73) respondents identified as hunters, comprising 77.7% the total respondents. Respondents were asked a total of thirty-five (35) questions, varying from multiple choice, select all that apply, and short responses. These questions asked about hunter and hunt characteristics, individual versus group hunting dynamics, dressing practices, hunter willingness to try various programs, current roadblocks, and suggestions for wild game distribution programs. When asked about interest in the proposed program, 75% indicated support, 19.4% indicated they might support, and 5.6% did not support.

Hunter Characteristics			
Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent
Do you have a Hunting License?	Yes	68	94.4%
	No	2	2.8%
	No, but would consider getting one	2	2.8%
What is your age group?	10 to 18	2	2.8%
	19 to 24	1	1.4%
	25 to 30	3	4.2%
	31 to 45	31	43.1%
	46 to 64	26	36.1%

	65 or over	9	12.5%
Are you part of a hunting group?	Yes - If yes, please type the name of your hunting group and the primary contact for the group	13	18.8%
	No	56	81.2%

Table 4. Summary of quantifiable hunter characteristics.

Respondents were also asked to provide information regarding their current hunting practices. When asked what type of hunting they performed, allowing for multiple selections, sixty (60) respondents used rifles, forty-four (44) used archery, twenty-eight (28) used trapping, twenty-nine (29) used dogs, four (4) used shotguns, two (2) used a muzzleloader, and one (1) used snares. Additionally, 61.1% preferred hunting in the mornings, 16.7% preferred the afternoon, and 22.2% preferred evenings and/or nights. When asked to identify the purpose of hunting, allowing for multiple selections, sixty-one (61) said subsistence, fifty-seven (57) selected recreation, fifteen (15) trade/barter, fourteen (14) used for other purposes, eight (8) for commercial use, and four (4) for tourism. From there, respondents were asked the primary use for the game they hunted. 87.7% indicated that food was the primary use, 9.2% stated recreation, and 3.1% selected other uses such as dog food or ungulate removal.

Location of Hunts				
Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent	Comments
Which islands have you hunted on? ^a	Hawai‘i Island	47	22.7%	-
	Maui	34	16.4%	-
	Lana‘i	42	20.3%	-
	Moloka‘i	32	15.5%	-
	Kaua‘i	14	6.8%	-
	O‘ahu	38	18.4%	-
Where do you hunt? ^a	Private Land	52	39.1%	-
	County-Owned Land	18	13.5%	-

	State Land	60	45.1%	-
	Other	3	2.3%	Federal Land (PTA) and TNC preserves
Do you have any agreements with private landowners in regards to hunting?	Yes - If yes, please specify in the space below	25	35.7%	Respondents primarily access hunting through landowner permission, clubs, or control programs, with rules varying by property and method allowed.
	No	45	64.3%	-

Table 5. Summary of quantifiable food distributor characteristics. Comments in this table were summarized based on respondents' elaboration of the corresponding response. *Respondents can select more than one option.

Respondents were also asked to report their hunting activities individually versus hunting as a group. When asked for individual frequency for hunting, sixteen (16) said less than once a month, nineteen (19) indicated once a month, ten (10) selected 2-3 times a month, seven (7) hunted weekly, and nine (9) hunted more than 4 times a month. Comparatively, group hunting frequency showed that twenty-one (21) respondents hunted less than once a month, fifteen (15) went once a month, six (6) went 2-3 times a month, four (4) selected more than 4 times a month, and nineteen (19) said they never hunted in groups. Further questions asked respondents to report the number of animals harvested per group as individuals and in groups. Individuals reported a minimum of 0.2 animals per hunt, a maximum of 20 animals, and an average of 1.5 animals. Many hunters reported harvesting one animal per hunt, of varying species. Others reported hunting multiple species per hunt, such as 2-3 pigs, 2-3 deer, and one goat. Group hunters reported harvests varying widely from 2-3 deer or 2-4 sheep per day, between different species. Deer were a common species hunted in groups, with some harvests yielding 10-25 deer per trip.

Species Hunted by Island			
Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent
On Hawai'i Island, what species do you primarily hunt?	Feral Pig	20	46.5%
	Mouflon Sheep	6	14%
	Feral Sheep	8	18.6%
	Mouflon-feral Hybrid Sheep	9	20.9%

	Axis Deer	25	83.3%
On Maui, what species do you primarily hunt?	Feral Pig	3	10%
	Feral Goat	2	6.7%
On Moloka'i, what species do you primarily hunt? ^a	Axis Deer	30	96.7%
	Feral Pig	1	3.3%
On Lāna'i, what species do you primarily hunt? ^a	Axis Deer (with permits or tags)	39	69.6%
	Mouflon Sheep (with permits or tags)	17	30.4%
On O'ahu, what species do you primarily hunt? ^a	Feral Pig	30	78.9%
	Feral Goat	8	21.1%
On Kaua'i, what species do you primarily hunt? ^a	Black-tail Deer (with permits or tags)	6	31.6%
	Feral Goat	5	26.3%
	Feral Pig	8	42.1%

Table 6. Summary of the species hunted on each island, respondents are only able to select [game mammals](#) that can be legally hunted on each island. ^aRespondents can select more than one option.

Respondents were further asked about their dressing practices, such as location, familiarity with food safety procedures, and the most valuable part of the carcass. Regarding location, 74.6% of respondents dressed their game in the field, 21.2% dressed at home, and the remaining 4.2% utilized a combination of both depending on the time of day. When asked about familiarity with food-safe handling procedures, 62.0% indicated familiarity, 33.8% had partial knowledge, and 4.2% did not know. When asked about carcass value, most respondents consider meat, especially cuts like backstrap and hindquarters, the most valuable part, with only a few noting the importance of trophies.

New Program Willingness

Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent	Comments
Would you be willing to live-trap and deliver any of the above species to a USDA inspected slaughterhouse?	Yes	41	58.6%	-
	No	29	41.4%	-
Would you be willing to hold an annual hunt(s) for the purpose of food donation for under-served populations (eg; food banks)?	Yes	31	47.0%	-
	Maybe	26	39.4%	-
	No	9	13.6%	-
Would you be willing to use an app on your smartphone to take a picture of the wild game and include information regarding where the wild game was harvested?	Yes	51	81.0%	-
	No	12	19.0%	-
If you were to participate in this program, would you be willing to use an app on your phone to record information related to the animal harvested? (ie: Location, Sex, Condition, type, date, and time of harvest)	Yes	53	84.1%	-
	No	10	15.9%	-
Would you be willing to abide by the food safety handling practices put forth by the Department of Health?	Yes	59	93.7%	-
	No, specify	4	6.3%	Most respondents are open to following DOH food safety guidelines, but raised concerns about feasibility, cost, liability, and familiarity with the regulations.

Would you be willing to take a food safe handling course and exam for an additional cost of \$25 administered through the Department of Land and Natural Resources if it was part of your hunter's education course?	Yes	51	81.0%	-
	No, specify	12	19.0%	Most felt it should be free or included in the hunter's education program to encourage broader participation, especially for those who wish to donate meat or cannot afford the cost.

Table 7. Summary of hunter willingness to comply with prospective programs. Comments in this table were summarized based on respondents' elaboration of the corresponding response.

In addition to their willingness to participate in various programs, respondents were asked to identify obstacles to donating game meat, including regulatory issues, and to suggest ways the state could provide support. When allowed to select more than one option, 31.2% cited a lack of knowledge about who can accept donations, while 26.4% pointed to a lack of knowledge about regulations, and 21.7% to the cost of processing. Additional barriers included time constraints, liability concerns, limited donation outlets or processors, the absence of a game management plan, and high hunting costs. 28.3% of respondents were aware of regulatory barriers and were asked to specify. Respondents emphasized that donated wild game must be processed and labeled in USDA-inspected facilities to meet food safety and legal requirements. Several noted that federal and state regulations currently restrict the donation, sale, or use of wild game for anything beyond personal consumption unless new legislation is passed. Additional concerns included bag limits, permits for removing animals from state hunting areas, and strict controls on live animal movement.

When asked to specify avenues for state-sponsored support, respondents recommended expanding USDA-inspected facilities, easing inspection requirements, increasing the number of inspectors, and providing clear donation and drop-off processes. They also emphasized fair access for processors, stronger state involvement, and the development of a wild game management plan aligned with conservation priorities. 45% of respondents also indicated that fiscal incentives would encourage participation in the wild game protein program. When asked to specify, respondents noted that hunting involves significant costs such as time, fuel, equipment, and effort. Several respondents would be more willing to donate game meat if those expenses were offset. Suggested incentives included direct payments, bounties, tax credits or deductions, grants, subsidies, or discounted inspection fees.

Slaughterhouse/ Butcher

Nine (9) respondents identified as a slaughterhouse and/or butchery, comprising 9.6% the total respondents. Three respondents, 30%, identified as slaughterhouses, while two, 20%, identified as a butcher shop. Respondents were asked a total of seventeen (17) questions, varying from multiple choice, select all that apply, and short responses. These questions asked about operational characteristics, current and future conditions required to accept wild game for processing, and potential challenges and support. When asked about interest in the proposed program, 80.0% indicated support, and 20.0% did not support.

Slaughterhouse and Butcher Characteristics			
Question	Responses	<i>n</i>	Percent
What island are you located on?	Maui	3	60.0%
	Lana‘i	1	20.0%
	O‘ahu	1	20.0%
If you are considered a slaughterhouse, is your facility permanent or considered a Mobile Processing Unit?	Permanent	1	33.3%
	Mobile Processing Unit	1	33.3%
	Other	1	33.3%
What is your current slaughter capacity for the following species each week on a per pound basis?	Beef	18,00 lbs	
	Axis Deer	2,000 lbs	
If you do not represent a slaughterhouse, what is your current capacity to fabricate a carcass (cutting an animal into smaller, more manageable pieces) each week for the following species on a per-pound basis?	Beef	14,000 lbs	

Table 8. Summary of quantifiable slaughterhouse and butcher characteristics. Capacities reported in pounds were the sums of all response values.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their operational ability and the conditions for accepting wild game protein for processing. When reporting on willingness to take live trapped animals, 33.3% would only accept feral sheep, and 66.7% would not accept any live trapped animals based on their understanding of USDA regulations. Furthermore, 100% of respondents do not currently accept wild game for processing; therefore, no current practices for processing wild game have been established. Respondents were then asked to respond in the hypothetical “if they were to accept wild game”. Respondents indicated the animal would ideally be deceased for 10-12 hours or less, without extended time, regardless of the conditions (i.e., keeping in cold storage, dressed, etc.). In regards to facility expansion, 66.7% said that their facility could not be expanded to meet wild game processing needs for donation. 33% have the cold storage space, 33% do not, and

another 33% would be willing to construct additional space. 50% of respondents also clarified that extra measures would have to be taken between slaughtering wild game and other species.

Respondents were again asked to elaborate on any barriers, in regulation or otherwise, that would prevent them from accepting wild game meat for processing. 66.7% saw no challenges, with the remaining 33.3% citing a challenge in scheduling labor and the use of the facility with other livestock. All respondents were unaware of any state or local regulations that would affect wild game processing. When asked if fiscal incentives would encourage participation, 66.7% agreed, suggesting reimbursement for the cost of processing, and inspector/training support.

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