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# Distribution and Impact of Canada Goose Crop Damage in East-Central Wisconsin

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## Distribution and Impact of Canada Goose Crop Damage in East-Central Wisconsin<sup>1</sup>

James W. Heinrich and Scott R. Craven<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Near Horicon marsh, in east-central Wisconsin, increasing fall concentrations of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) have produced many opportunities, and a few difficult problems. The problem of crop depredations has plagued the Horicon area since the mid-1960's and has resulted in many changes in goose management in Wisconsin.

A lack of basic data on the attitudes and concerns of Horicon area farmers hindered resolution of the crop depredation issue. In 1985 the Wisconsin Canada Goose Survey was conducted to address this need. A random sample of the 5,960 area farmers received the questionnaire in the mail early in 1986. Two more mailings encouraged those who had not responded to make their opinions known. Eighty-two percent of the sample ultimately returned a usable survey. This reflects responses from 11% of the area's farm population.

<sup>1</sup>Paper presented at the Eighth Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop. [Rapid City, S.D., April 28-30, 1987].

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Generalizing from the survey data, Horicon area farmers perceived a 1.6 million dollar loss to Canada geese in 1985, mainly in alfalfa, winter wheat, and standing corn. The farmers did not feel that they were able to prevent unacceptable losses, even with the help of propane cannons and other abatement devices supplied by the agencies. They felt that changes in hunting laws and the managed increase in goose numbers had increased their crop losses. The farmers of east-central Wisconsin said that there are too many geese, and they called for a reduction in the flock.

The concerns of Wisconsin's farmers need to be addressed before further growth in the Mississippi Valley Population of Canada geese is approved. The survey results suggested that economic incentives for goose management could make the flock more attractive to farmers. If the value of the flock warrants it, these should be considered. In 1986 we began to examine the economic benefits that the Canada goose flock brings to east-central Wisconsin. Survey information from the local business community, the tourists who came to view the geese, and goose hunters will allow a better assessment of the economic impact of MVP Canada geese in east-central Wisconsin.