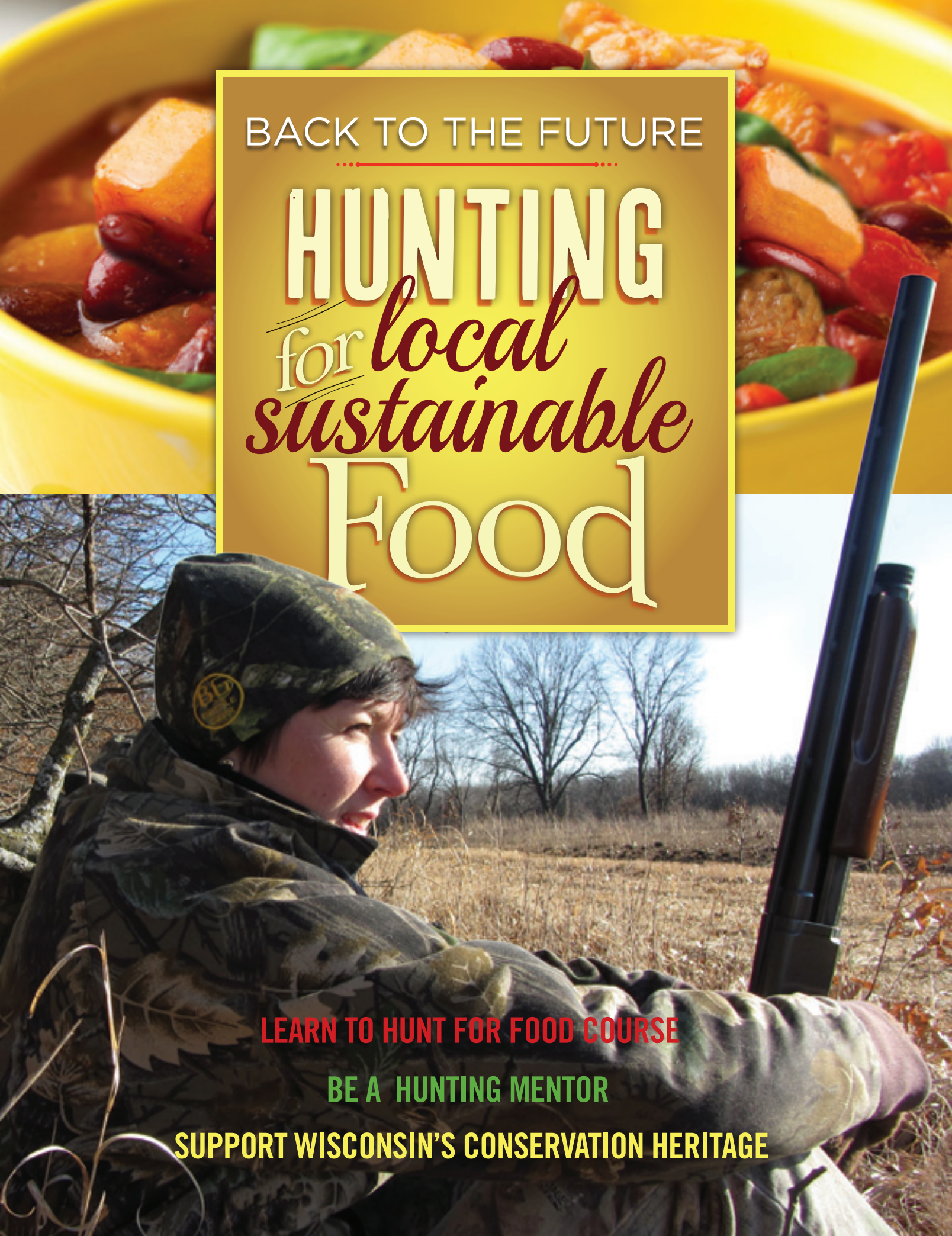
BACK TO THE FUTURE
HUNTING
for local sustainable
Food
LEARN TO HUNT FOR FOOD COURSE
BE A HUNTING MENTOR
SUPPORT WISCONSIN'S CONSERVATION HERITAGE

BACK TO THE FUTURE

HUNTING for local sustainable Food

A recent and growing trend in the United States has been an uptick in people who are conscientious about their food sources because of commitments to personal health, ethical treatment of animals and environmental awareness. In addition to those values there exists the potential for new interest in hunting from a perspective that many longtime hunters share. Hunter participation is critical to conservation because conservation efforts depend on hunting license revenue and excise taxes paid on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment.

That's a match made for success! Potential adult hunters are interested in hunting but may have little or no connection to hunting or anyone to train them; longtime hunters are ready, willing and excited to share their skills; and the conservation community is served with greater conservation awareness and continuing funds. It only makes sense then that we introduce as many novice hunters as we can to hunting for sustainability to maintain the future of hunting and wildlife conservation.

The Department of Natural Resources is shifting the focus of solely recruiting and training youth to hunt, to offering programs aimed at adult, novice hunters. Why? Adults want to hunt, they have the ability to hunt, they have the maturity required, they are strongly motivated to learn, they have broad networks to support hunting, they may teach more new hunters within their community, and they are, or may become parents — and parents really are the best hunting recruiters, after all.

In 2012 the Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with Madison College, developed a Learn to Hunt for Food course for adults to address both the decline in hunting license sales and the increased interest in local food and sustainable living among young adults. The first offering had about 20 participants and interest continues to grow. This year the waiting list for the course was nearly as big as the number of attendees.

Cover top: Turkey stew/THINKSTOCK
Cover bottom: Hilary Dugan, a student in DNR's Learn to Hunt for Food course, takes to the field on her first turkey hunt./DNR FILE

Adult Learn to Hunt for Food courses offer deer and turkey hunting options, but more opportunities (like small game) will be coming.

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ADULT LEARN TO HUNT FOR FOOD COURSE

Learn to Hunt for Food courses meet for four weeks. During that time, students are introduced to conservation in North America, learn about hunting and conservation, and study the biology and life history of species. Students also get hands-on experience shooting, learn how to properly handle firearms and have the option to complete their hunter safety education.

The course touches on how to find places to hunt, such as using the DNR's public access lands atlas. Students are taught proper scouting techniques, how to butcher game species and how to prepare and cook wild game — all through hands-on activities. There are also many food tasting opportunities.

The course wraps up with an option to participate in a 2-day hunt. The first day allows participants to target shoot and there is a potluck dinner where the hunters can get to know their mentors. An overnight stay is a possibility for participants to get a "hunting camp" experience. On the second day, the hunter and mentor head into the field. After the hunt, the mentor and hunter are encouraged to return to the "hunting camp," share their stories and participate in field dressing and butchering any harvested game.

Learn to Hunt for Food courses have focused on deer and wild turkey, but more opportunities (like small game) will be coming. With ample amount of satisfaction from both participants and instructors, and as word about these courses continues to spread, there is an increasing demand by new individuals wishing to participate in an upcoming course, but mentors are needed.

If you are interested in becoming a mentor or student for an upcoming Learn to Hunt for Food course, or you'd like to host one yourself, please contact DNR's Hunting and Shooting Sports Coordinator, Keith Warnke (608-576-5243; Keith.Warnke@wisconsin.gov) or Hunter Recruitment and Retention Assistant, Kelly Maynard (608-267-7438; Kelly.Maynard@wisconsin.gov).

Visit dnr.wi.gov and search "learn to hunt" for more about Wisconsin's Learn to Hunt program.

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Students participate in the classroom part of a Learn to Hunt for Food course.

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Learning how to skin deer harvested during a Learn to Hunt course.

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Learning how to properly clean, prepare and cut game meat.

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Cooking some local and sustainable harvested food.

BE A MENTOR: A REWARDING WAY TO GIVE BACK

Serving as a mentor can be one of the most rewarding aspects of your hunting career. Seeing the look and excitement on the apprentice hunter's face as she or he learns about conservation and hunting, as well as when they harvest their first animal, is one you will never forget, and knowing you were part of making that happen is beyond rewarding.

Requirements

Who can be a mentor? Anyone over age 18 with five years of hunting experience can take an apprentice through the mentored hunting program.

Rewards for mentors

There can be more to the incentives for mentors than the success of the apprentice. If you, as a mentor, recruit three new license buyers in a year, you can qualify for reduced license rates. A mentor with recruiter points can buy a resident conservation patron license for $105 ($60 savings). Also, by choosing to be a mentor, you have more opportunities to get out in the woods and fields to practice and improve your hunting skills, while at the same time teaching someone how to hunt for the first time. So you get:

- possible reduced license fees,
- practice/skill improvement and
- more time hunting!

Continued on back

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Mentor Peggy Farrell and apprentice Erika Kachama-Nkoy.

Commitment as a mentor

As a mentor, you should be willing to scout out and find an area to hunt with your apprentice. Making sure the site is ready for the day of hunting is important, including finding a place to set up a blind or stand. Participating in this part of the hunt also can improve an apprentice hunter's experience.

Becoming a hunter takes more than one experience. Apprentice hunters need a mentor, but many also need a hunting partner. This can be the most rewarding part of mentoring. The more times you are willing to take the apprentice hunter out, the greater the likelihood that the apprentice will eventually become a hunter, and you could gain a new hunting partner to go along with the pride of stepping up to maintain the hunting heritage in Wisconsin.

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Two novice hunters and their mentors after a successful turkey hunt.

DNR FILE

Learning proper firearm handling.

A mentor willing and able to commit to an established relationship with an apprentice hunter will show greater success. Being able to commit to at least a year-long relationship is ideal. Introducing an apprentice hunter to a variety of different hunts such as deer, turkey and small game over the period of a year will likely increase the chances that the apprentice decides to continue and practice hunting.

Finding an apprentice

The best way to find an apprentice hunter is to reach out to a friend or family member who you know is interested in learning to hunt. The Learn to Hunt program can also be a good option to find an apprentice.

You can also ask around. A co-worker or neighbor may be interested in hunting, but may not know how to begin. You can change this with an introduction through Wisconsin's Mentored Hunting program. An apprentice does not need to take a hunter safety course prior to obtaining a mentored hunting license. This is a great way for you as a mentor to introduce someone to hunting in a very easy manner.

Visit dnr.wi.gov and search "mentored hunting" for more information about the Mentored Hunting program.

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