

A TALE OF TWO BUCKS —

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN





- PA BRUTE

Say used Whitetail Institute's Imperial Oats Plus as a nurse crop with his primary planting of Fusion, a mixture of clover and chicory. This 148-inch brute was the result.

Careful management and an innovative stand strategy helped Pennsylvania hunter Jason Say kill two great bucks in a highly pressured area.

■ by Gordy J. Krahn

Jason Say's journey that ended when he shot a bruiser 148-inch Pennsylvania buck during Fall 2020 actually began when an even larger buck began showing up with clockwork regularity at one of his food plots three years earlier. And although his home state is not known for monster bucks, Say was staring down the possibility of putting an arrow in his largest Keystone State buck.

"I had this huge buck coming into a small Whitetail Institute Pure Attraction food plot every single night, and it was absolutely driving me crazy, because I had to be at my sister-in-law's wedding on the Saturday of the archery season opener, and in Pennsylvania, you can't hunt on Sunday," Say said. "I was losing my mind thinking, 'He's in there, the wind is perfect, everything is just right.'"

Unfortunately, things didn't stay "just right." As (bad) luck would have it, the wind was wrong for hunting the food plot that Monday and Tuesday, and the Pennsylvania bowhunter had to anxiously bide his time, waiting for his first opportunity at the buck and hoping it would stick to its pattern of showing up at the food plot during shooting hours.

The wind turned a little on Wednesday, and Say hunted the plot. Almost immediately, he began seeing deer, including six bucks. It was very warm — 80 degrees — but that buck was so patterned that Say was confident it would show up.

"He was one of the easiest deer I've ever hunted, because I had him so patterned for the past month and a half — he was basically living in this plot," Say said. "And he was also the biggest."

It's great when a plan comes together. The buck appeared before dark, and a 37-yard shot put the 154-inch monster on the ground.

A TRADITION OF HUNTING

Say grew up in northwestern Pennsylvania, where the hunting tradition is strong but truly big bucks are somewhat rare.



“If you know anything about this state, you know that when it comes to big bucks, we’re not Iowa, we’re not Illinois. Pennsylvania has one of the highest hunting populations in the country — almost a million hunters. But with antler restrictions in place, we’re finally starting to see bigger and bigger bucks.”

Say said his story is similar to those of many people from Pennsylvania.

“Growing up here, hunting was a way of life,” he said. “Before you were 12, you’d sit by the window all day waiting for your dad to come home from hunting so you could hear his stories and see if he got a deer. Then when you turned 12, you could barely stand the excitement until you could go hunting with your dad and your uncles and do deer drives on the first Saturday of doe

season. So, I was like 99 percent of the kids in Pennsylvania back in the ’80s. We grew up hunting. We loved it, and that’s what we did.”

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Fast forward three years, and it was déjà vu all over again for the Pennsylvania bowhunter, when about two weeks before the season opener, a buck eerily similar to the one he’d shot three years prior began showing up at one of his most remote food plots, which was seeded in a nurse crop of White-tail Institute’s Imperial Oats Plus and a primary planting of Fusion, a mixture of clover and chicory. A nurse crop is a fast-growing secondary crop that’s planted with a primary crop (in this case, Fusion) in the same seedbed to take some of the pressure off of the pe-

rennial crop.

“It was my first year planting a nurse crop with Fusion, and man, the deer just hammered it,” he said.

“This was a very hard food plot to get to. It was one of those cameras that I’d check once every four or five months because it was such a pain to get in there. Then, when I started using Moultrie cellular technology and could check my cameras remotely, I was able to increase my surveillance of the plot and discovered a huge buck was routinely visiting the plot. And the cool thing was, I was getting all of these pictures sent right to my phone, and that buck was there every evening, same as the other one. And I’m thinking, this guy is here all of the time. I can kill this buck.”

Behind every successful hunt is the strategy, planning and hard work that

- PURE ATTRACTION SCORES BIG BUCK

Say shot this 154-inch trophy using Pure Attraction, which is a mix of Oats Plus and forage brassicas.



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PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME

Say has been planting food plots for 13 years, and he said his story is typical: A guy starts by planting one or two plots and sees the positive effects it has on attracting deer and holding them on the property, and it grows from there.

“You know, I got addicted early on, and that passion has just grown,” he said. “We do have a strategy when we plant our food plots, and it’s been absolutely instrumental in me turning this strip mine property around. There have always been a lot of bucks here, but it’s super thick, there aren’t a lot of large trees around and it’s difficult to hunt. And there’s not a lot to eat up there. So, by planting these food plots, we’re able to draw them out of the thick stuff to eat. The biggest problem is that it just gets mowed down. It looks like they’re chewing on the ground almost — but that’s a good problem to have. The food plots have been extremely beneficial, to not only draw and hold more deer but helping us kill more deer, because now we don’t have to go into that thick stuff. We can leave that alone, and we can draw them out in the food plots and kill those deer.”

Say’s daughter plays basketball and can only hunt weekends, but he really wanted to get her a buck.

“So, on opening day, Saturday, I sat with her, and sure enough that buck was there, and I got pictures with my camera,” he said. “We were in a ground blind hunting a Whitetail Institute Imperial No-Plow plot, and a real nice 8-pointer came in, but she wasn’t able to get a shot.”

Say couldn’t hunt the stand again until Monday.

“I got in there, and it was a train wreck of a night,” he said. “I never did see that buck. I had some does get in behind me, and they winded me and there were deer blowing out everywhere. I was really dejected because I know with a big buck like this — especially in a high-pressured state such as Pennsylvania — you get only so many chances. So, I’m thinking, man, it might be over. I said to myself, ‘I’m going to do everything I can to try and get rid of my scent in case this buck shows back up.’ Well, the next night, my phone buzzes, and sure enough, he was back in there. So, I’m going, all right, I’m going back in there, but we had real high winds on Wednesday, and I didn’t want to risk it, so I decided to wait because the forecast for Thursday looked better.”

Say returned to the plot Thursday and had deer all around him.

“It was nerve racking,” he said. “I had a 10-pointer come in, and it was everything I could do to not shoot him, but I knew I wouldn’t see that big one if I did. I think I had four other bucks in there that evening and a bunch of does, and then, sure enough, right before dark, I see a couple of little bucks come busting out like something pushed them, and I can just see this huge rack underneath the tree beside me, and I knew right away it was him. I was filming myself, and I wanted him to come out a little more to get some footage, but I had some does in behind me, and they started stomping, so it was now

put the odds in a hunter’s favor, and that setup had challenges.

“This was one of those stands, quite frankly, where there weren’t a lot of options,” Say said. “I knew I wanted to get a food plot up on top of this hill, but this is an old strip mine, and there are not a lot of big trees [suitable for a tree stand] up there. There’s a reason there’s lots of deer up there: It’s difficult to hunt it. It’s difficult to get to it. It’s thick, thick, thick stuff. I knew that wherever we put a food plot in it was going to attract deer, but we needed to find a place where we could actually hunt it.”

Say’s solution was to put in the plot next to a stand of small pines — not tall enough for a tree stand, but where he could jam a tripod stand back in them and have some cover.



FIELD OF DREAMS
 This gorgeous Pure Attraction
 food plot attracted the 2017 buck
 Say harvested.

or never. I kind of leaned out over my tripod stand and let it rip — and made a perfect shot on him. He ended up going about a hundred yards and piling up, and I had my second big buck from northwestern Pennsylvania — Oct. 1, 2020.”

For Say, tagging his second big Pennsylvania buck in three years was extremely rewarding.

“There’s nothing quite like matching wits with a big, mature buck — when you actually get it done and put that deer on the ground,” he said. “If that doesn’t excite you, then there’s something wrong, and you shouldn’t be hunting. To shoot two bucks like these on my home ground here in Pennsylvania — where I did the work, where I put in the food plots, where I put in the stands and where I developed the strategy — it was extremely gratifying when all of that hard work paid off.”



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