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Rodent Control

Every fall, veterinarians, flock supervisors, breeder and grow-out managers will send out “reminder” memos regarding rodent control. For many farm managers and growers rodent control is somewhere towards the bottom of the never ending “To Do” list. This usually means that rodent control is applied sporadically or the program consists of throwing some packets of bait onto the entry room floor. The program is usually deemed to be successful if the flock does not get cholera or if rodents do not overrun the farm. In addition to introducing diseases into a flock, rodents consume and contaminate feed, gnaw on structural, mechanical, electrical and various utility components. The actual costs of rodent damage to a turkey operation are difficult to assess accurately. Consequently, when feed conversions aren’t quite what they should be and fuel costs are higher, few people stop to consider that perhaps the rodents on the farm are contributing to the problem.

Winter is one of the most strategic times to try to eradicate rodents for two reasons. Firstly, it is at this time of year that rodent populations are at their lowest. Studies have shown that less than 50 mice living around a farm can increase to over 2,000 mice in only 6 months. Reducing their numbers will prevent this exponential population surge. Secondly, during the cold weather, rodents are more likely to consume bait, as other sources of feed such as grains in the fields are no longer available.

The following are critical steps in a rodent control program:

STEP ONE

Eliminate the reasons (feed, water, nesting sites) why rodents want to infest your farm. Remove the welcome mat. Clean up feed spillage from bins quickly. Eliminate all outside debris such as old equipment, boards, pipes etc., that rodents can use for hiding or nesting. Eliminate weeds to provide a 3 foot (1 m) clean perimeter around each building.

STEP TWO

Stop rodents from gaining access to your buildings. Good building construction is a must. Mice can enter through a hole the size of a dime (18mm) and rats through a quarter-sized (24mm) hole. It is important to specifically audit your facilities looking for evidence of rodent activity and for areas where they might be entering. If you don’t look you won’t find. A common entry point for mice is the unprotected end of corrugated metal siding on buildings. Doors must fit snugly or have anti-pest tension strips or door sweeps installed. Close openings around augers, pipes and wires with cement mortar, masonry or metal collars.

STEP THREE

Reduce the rodent population by trapping or providing poison baits. This involves proper selection and location of bait stations and bait. There are many different types and forms of baits available. Single dose poisons are preferable. The best one to use is the one which the rodents on your farm prefer. To determine this, choose an area of high rodent activity and leave a variety of types

of baits on a piece of cardboard in a sheltered area (ie: behind a piece of wood leaning against a wall). In a few days check to see which bait(s) your rodents prefer and use those ones to bait the entire farm. Certain forms such as wax blocks are useful in damp or in hard-to-reach areas such as attics. Do not store baits with other chemicals or handle with bare hands, as the bait may absorb odours, which will reduce the bait's effectiveness. Carefully read and follow label directions on all rodenticides which are poisonous, and handle them accordingly.

The use of bait stations or bait boxes is very important for the following reasons:

- Containers keep the bait fresh and reduce the amount of wasted bait. Rodents won't eat bait that is wet or moldy.
- Containers allow you to monitor bait consumption.
- Rodents like to eat in protected areas.
- Containers reduce the chances of accidental poisoning of pets and children.

There are many commercially available bait stations including tamper resistant boxes. Homemade containers can be constructed from lengths of metal or plastic PVC pipes, 12-24 inch (30.5-61 cm) in length, wooden boxes or large cans. Containers should be large enough to accommodate several rodents at one time and should have at least two rodent-size openings: 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) for mice and 2.5 inches (6.4 cm) for rats. Bait stations should be monitored weekly at the beginning of a control program or if the infestation is heavy. Replace bait in only those areas and/or containers in which bait has been entirely consumed. Once control is achieved, check and replenish interior baits every 2 weeks. For minor infestations baits can be placed out in only those areas where rodents are active, persistent or likely to enter.

Baits must be placed in strategic areas within the farm where rodents will encounter them. Remember that mice are sporadic and nervous feeders. They

feed at many locations each evening nibbling tiny bits of food here and there. Many people under-bait in their control program. Baits should be placed every 8-10 feet (2.4-3m) for mouse infestations and every 25-50 feet (7.6-15m) for rat infestations in those areas showing activity. This includes attics, which rodents often utilize during the cooler months. Attics must be baited otherwise the rodents living upstairs will continually replace those rodents killed by your baiting program at floor level. Bait should be placed on both sides of the center beam. It is also important to establish permanent bait stations around the outside of the barn. They should flank any doors or utility openings, which would allow rodents from field areas to enter the barn. Replace exterior bait every 4-6 weeks or sooner if the bait becomes wet or rancid.

In conclusion, to be successful in controlling rodents you must do the following:

- Know what you are up against (ie: your weaknesses and your opponent's strengths).
- Audit the farm to determine the rodent load, structural integrity of the barns, rodent access points and why they are attracted to your farm in the first place.
- Rodent proof all buildings and eliminate hiding and nesting areas around the barns.
- Determine the best type(s) of bait for the rodents on your farm and use it in suitable bait stations placed in strategic locations. Do not under-bait.
- Monitor the bait stations. Refill as needed. Keep records of activity at each station.

Finally, the most important part of a successful rodent control program is to make it a priority on the farm: not just when you see rodents but ALL the time.

References:

1. Corrigan, R. and R. Timm. Controlling Rodents in Commercial Poultry Facilities. Cooperative Extension Service, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.
 2. Clark, S. 1993. Save time and money with this rodent control program. Turkey World. Pgs. 20 – 22.
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