



Lawrence County Livestock Newsletter - January 2016

I hope everybody had a wonderful holiday season with family and friends. I thought with this newsletter I might talk about something affecting all aspects of livestock production. The estimated damage inflicted by these animals to both agriculture and the environment stands at \$1.5 billion annually. I am talking about the feral hog epidemic across the nation.

Hogs are prolific breeders, starting at six to ten months of age; sows can produce 1.5 litters per year with an average of six piglets per litter. Feral hogs have few predators after reaching maturity. These two factors are the major reasons that fuel this animal's ability to populate an area.



Game camera photo of Feral Pigs in western Lawrence County

The feeding and wallowing behaviors of feral hogs create a number of problems, including agricultural crop loss, wildlife habitat loss, water pollution and disease transmission to livestock and sometimes people. Nonnative feral hogs compete directly with native wildlife species for limited food supplies, disturb habitat and consume small mammals and reptiles. Feral hogs occasionally consume the young of larger mammals and eggs and young of ground-nesting birds such as the northern bobwhite and wild turkey.

Along with the damage they physically inflict, there are some health concerns associated with coming into contact with feral hogs. Wild pigs are carriers of at least 45 different parasites (external and internal) and diseases (bacterial and viral) that pose a threat to livestock, pets, wildlife, and in some cases, human health. Feral hogs may carry or transmit many diseases to humans and livestock such as pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, tuberculosis, tick fever, and anthrax to name a few. The two diseases of feral hogs of most concern are pseudorabies and swine brucellosis.

Pseudorabies is a viral disease of the central nervous system that can affect domestic and feral hogs, and fatally affect cattle, horses, goats, sheep, dogs, and cats. Symptoms of this virus include anorexia, excessive salivation, spasms, convulsions, and intense itching followed by paralysis and death. Once infected, the hog is a lifetime carrier of the disease and will periodically shed the virus through the mouth and nose. Transmission of the disease can be through direct contact, contaminated feed and water, ingestion of infected tissues, or contaminated trailers. This disease is not related to the rabies virus so it does not infect people.

Swine brucellosis can cause infertility in boars and abortions in sows feral or domestic. It is transmitted to other hogs through reproductive discharges such as semen and afterbirth, and, once infected the animal is a carrier for life. The only effective way to control this disease is to test and remove infected individuals, which is impossible in a wild population.

Swine brucellosis is contagious to humans, through tissues, blood, urine and feces. When humans contract this disease it is called undulant fever because body temperature rises and falls like flu-like symptoms. In pigs, symptoms include lameness, arthritis, abscesses, and sometimes death.

Swine brucellosis is of concern to the cattle industry because this bacterium can cause a false positive test for bovine brucellosis. When a positive test for bovine brucellosis is found, the cattle herd is quarantined leaving the rancher with an economic loss.

Anthrax is a serious soil borne disease most commonly associated with neutral or alkaline soils that serve as reservoirs for the organism's spores. Arkansas is recognized as an endemic area for Anthrax. Although uncommon, the feral hog may become infected when feeding. Humans can contract this disease from contaminated animals or soil. The disease in humans is often fatal if not promptly treated with antibiotics.

Dealing with this problem will take meeting it on several fronts. One practice will not fix the problem. It is estimated that 70% of the pig's population has to be removed each year just to maintain current levels. This is a difficult task to achieve. Hog numbers can be reduced by hunting with or without dogs and trapping. The most effective way is trapping but both practices need to be utilized. Current laws allow feral hogs to be killed or trapped year round, day or night, by a landowner or anyone who has the landowner's permission. There is no limit to the number of feral hogs that a person can take and they do not need a hunting license from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission to take feral hogs on private land. Anyone who has a revoked hunting license is not allowed to hunt feral hogs during the time of revocation.

A feral hog that has been captured in a trap or by other means must be killed immediately. The rare exception is trappers who have feral hog ear tags issued by Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission for transport to a terminal facility. There are only a couple licensed terminal facilities in the state, and only a limited number of trappers per facility .

Anytime you are dealing with feral hogs always remember "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Feral hogs can be consumed by humans and they also make good table fare. However, certain preventative steps must be taken when dressing or preparing the meat including:

- Wear disposable latex or plastic gloves and eye protection when dressing and cleaning wild pigs
- Avoid direct contact with blood and reproductive organs
- As soon as possible, wash your hands with soap and hot water
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect work area and tools used to dress and butcher wild hogs
- Burn or bury gloves and the remains of the animal
- Follow correct refrigeration, freezing, and cooking methods. Freezing to 0 degrees F will render bacteria inactive but will not destroy them, once thawed, bacteria can again become active. Also, do not rely on home freezing to destroy Trichina and other parasites. Thorough cooking will destroy all parasites and kill bacteria. Cook wild pork to an internal temperature of 165 to 170 degrees.
- A healthy feral hog population can and does affect landowners and farmers in many ways. By pulling together and addressing this issue countywide we can reduce the amount of destruction these animals can impose. Feral hogs are not a big problem in Lawrence County as of right now but if steps are not taken right now I fear the problem will get worse quicker than we anticipate.

For more information about feral hogs or the control measures that can be taken please call the Lawrence County Extension office at 886-3741. I currently have a trap gate available to anyone who has a problem and wants to try to trap feral hogs. I would also like to know if you have seen any hogs or sign on your property.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Agri Appreciation Day- Friday February 5th** at Black River Technical College Development Center Auditorium. Registration will start at 7:30 AM with the program starting at 8:00 AM. There will be a free fish lunch at 12:15 along with door prizes.
- Scoring cattle according to body condition, feet, udder, and reproductive traits to maximize profits presented at the **Lawrence/Randolph Cattlemen's Association meeting on Thursday March 17th**.
- **Little Red River Beef Cattle Conference- March 17th** Pruitt's Mid-State Stockyards in Damascus Arkansas. Topics covered will include: beef market, fly control, reproductive technologies, and common cattle diseases. Registration will start at 11:30 AM and adjourn at 3:30 PM, cost is \$20.