

**Perceptions of
County Agriculture Agents
about Feral Hogs
in Arkansas**



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Perceptions of County Agriculture Agents about Feral Hogs in Arkansas

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Story in Brief

In many southeastern states, increasing feral hog populations are of concern. Feral hogs have been associated with agriculture damage to row crops and pastures, disease transmission to livestock and people, poor water quality, and competition with wildlife. Arkansas agriculture agents in all 75 counties were asked their perceptions about feral hogs as a reflection of the broader agriculture community. Although almost three-fourths (72%) reported problems with feral hogs in their county, almost half (47%) indicated feral hogs were a relatively minor agriculture issue at that time. Nine of twelve counties (16%) which reported major issues with feral hogs were located in southwest Arkansas. Pasture damage was the most common feral hog problem with almost one-quarter (23%) reporting “a lot” of damage.

Introduction

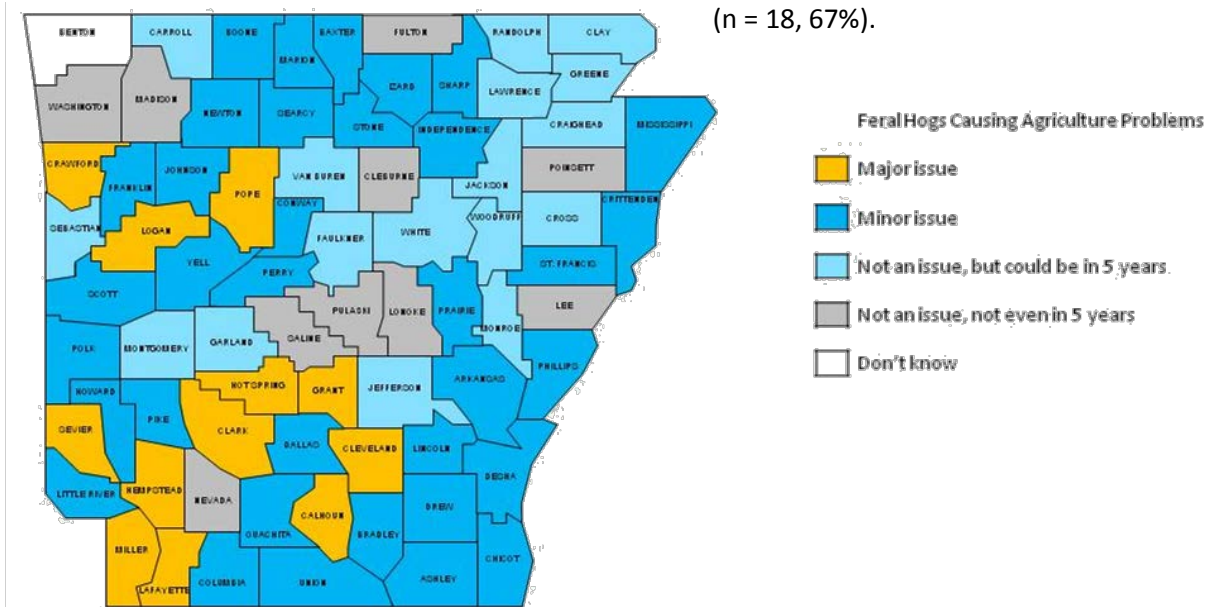
Feral hogs are prevalent and of growing concern in the southeastern U.S. including Arkansas. County agriculture agents were asked their perceptions about the significance of problems associated with feral hogs as a reflection of the broader agriculture community.

County staff chairs or a delegated agriculture agent responded to an on-line questionnaire or telephone interview. Responses were received from November 20 – December 13, 2013. Sixty-seven counties responded initially, with follow-up telephone reminders and interviews conducted for the eight remaining counties.

County Perspectives

The majority of counties reported feral hogs caused problems this past year (n = 54, 72%). However, feral hogs were a major agriculture issue in only 12 counties (16%). None indicated feral hogs were “the most important issue” in their county this past year.

Figure 1 illustrates most counties (n = 35, 47%) reported feral hogs were a minor problem when compared to other agriculture issues. Generally agents from the central region and two northern corners of the state reported fewer issues with feral hogs than other regions. Of the 27 counties (36%) indicating feral hogs were not a problem now, most predicted feral hogs would be a problem in the next five years (n = 18, 67%).



Feral Hog Damage Problems

Pasture damage was the most common feral hog problem that agents reported. Feral hogs caused “a little” (n = 37, 49%) to “a lot” of damage (n = 17, 23%) in almost three-fourths (72%) of all reporting counties (Table 1). Feral hogs caused “a lot” of crop damage in eight counties (i.e., Ashley, Clark, Crawford, Desha,

Hot Spring, Lafayette, Miller, and Prairie Counties). Over half the counties reported timber and wildlife habitat were damaged “a lot” (n =12, 16%; n = 15, 20%, respectively) or “a little” (n =28, 37%; n = 28, 37%, respectively) by feral hogs. Almost all reported either having none (n = 38, 51%) or not knowing of (n = 33, 44%) disease transmission issues in their county.

Table 1. Perceptions of county agriculture agents about the extent to which feral hogs caused problems in their county during the past year (n = 75).

Type of feral hog damage	Percent response*			
	A lot	A little	None at all	Don't know
Crop damage	11%	36%	36%	12%
Pasture damage	23%	49%	17%	8%
Timber or forest damage (e.g., seedling or sapling damage, scaring trees)	16%	37%	23%	21%
Landscape or turf damage	1%	23%	40%	33%
Equipment damage (e.g., fencing, feeders, tractor damage from rutted fields, collision)	5%	40%	33%	17%
Water contamination from rooting or wallowing (e.g., sedimentation, fecal)	5%	29%	31%	31%
Disease transmission to livestock or people	-	3%	51%	44%
Livestock aggravation	4%	24%	39%	31%
Wildlife habitat damage/population impacts	20%	37%	20%	20%
Other (written comments):				
• A person reported \$4000 in damages from hitting a hog with her vehicle while driving through the Pond Creek Refuge	X			
• Eat pecans and prevent harvest by mechanical harvesters.	X			
• Direct threats to people in hunting and hiking situations.		X		
• Very few reports of damage in Polk Co. Have been hunted pretty heavily in past 10 years. A lot of our land is timberland and not seen often. Know there are problems not being reported.		X		
• Rooted holes in fields impede spray applications		X		
• The only damage we have heard about was a little in pasture near Cabot.			X	
• A few hogs have been photographed by game cameras per report but no damage reported.			X	
• We have had a few sightings of feral hogs in Clay County but I don't know of any damage they have caused if any.				X
• I had no reports but it doesn't mean that there were not any damage.				X
• No phone calls on feral hogs were received in either office. Producers occasionally talk about feral hogs rooting in their pastures.				
• Northwest part of the county from Clinton north over to Scotland and Alread to Chimes probably has more problems but they are limited to the woodlands and have caused minimal damage so far.				

* Some percentages do not equal 100% because some respondents did not provide an answer and were counted as “missing data.”

Clientele and Monetary Impacts

Statewide, an estimated 1,492 clients contacted county Extension offices about problems with feral hogs in the past year. Estimates ranged from 1 to 200 clientele in their county who reported problems. Nineteen (25%) counties reported no clients had feral hog problems. Eleven (15%) skipped the question altogether.

County agents were asked to estimate total monetary losses from feral hog problems in their county this past year (Table 2). Overall, most reported losses of \$1 to \$10,000 (n = 26, 35%) or no monetary loss (n = 15, 21%). A few counties (n = 10, 13%) reporting losses exceeding \$50,000. When assessed by district, more counties in the Ouachita District reported

higher monetary losses compared to other districts. One Delta District county (i.e., Desha County) reported the highest estimate of monetary loss with feral hog damage exceeding \$250,000.

Knowledge & Interest in Feral Hogs

To assist with program development, county agents were asked (1) their knowledge of new legislation about feral hogs and (2) their interest in conducting educational programs about methods for feral hog control. Most agents reported being somewhat (n = 29, 39%) or slightly (n = 24, 32%) knowledgeable about the new regulations (Table 3). Almost all (n = 66, 89%) were interested to some degree in conducting educational programs about feral hog control (Table 4).

Table 2. Estimated total monetary loss from feral hog problems in districts and counties (n = 75) this past year as reported by county Extension agents.

Monetary loss	Percent Response			
	Delta	Ouachita	Ozark	Total
\$0 (no monetary loss)	36%	8%	20%	21%
\$1 to \$10,000	20%	32%	52%	35%
\$10,001 to \$50,000	8%	24%	12%	15%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	8%	8%	-	5%
\$100,001 to \$250,000	8%	12%	-	7%
More than \$250,000	4%	-	-	1%
Don't know	16%	16%	16%	16%

Table 3. Self-reported knowledge by county agents about recent legislation regarding capture and transport of feral hogs (n = 75).

Level of knowledge	Response	
	Number	Percent
Very knowledgeable	9	12%
Somewhat knowledgeable	29	39%
Slightly knowledgeable	24	32%
Not at all knowledgeable	11	15%
Don't know	2	3%

Table 4. Interest of county Extension agents in conducting educational programs about feral hog control (n = 74).

Level of interest	Response	
	Number	Percent
Very interested	18	24%
Somewhat interested	28	38%
Slightly interested	20	27%
Not at all interested	7	9%
Don't know	1	1%

Comments

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked if they had additional comments. These are listed below in categories (n = 12, 16%).

Prior feral hog damage problems

- Feral Hog damage is highly dependent on the weather we have throughout the year. Drought years usually result in more pasture damage because hogs are seeking out water.
- There has been numbers of feral hogs in the county in previous years that have caused some pasture damage, but have not seen any damage in the past 2-3 years.

Feral hog damage issues are appearing/eminent

- Problem is getting worse every year. Over the past few years they are starting to show up in row crop fields.
- Very few if any calls about feral hogs but I know it is just a matter of time or they could be a bigger problem than I have indicated.
- We have not had much damage due to hogs. However, the fact that they are present has producers concerned that increased populations may be a problem in the future causing increase damage across the county.

Specific information about feral hog damage and control

- Damage is more significant to corn than soybeans, cotton, or rice. Hogs in heavy concentrations compete heavily with deer for natural mast crops such as acorns and pecans. They destroy food plots and supplemental food plots. They cause some damage to roads and turn rows. The heaviest concentration in the county is areas along the Mississippi River Levee with significant timber

acreage. This is mostly in the northern part of the county. I am told this is a concern for the levee district due to potential damage to the levee.

- The biggest issue that I hear about the hog damaged areas is related to the Arkansas Game and Fish and their wildlife management areas that the hogs can't be hunted with dogs. The producers adjacent to the properties claim that they are a breeding and safe haven for the hogs because traditional methods of hunting the hogs with dogs can't go on the Management Areas

Interest in educational programming dependent on increasing feral hog problems

- If feral hogs become more of a problem in our county, we would be interested in conducting educational programs for our clientele.
- If populations of feral hogs invade our county, we would be very interested in conducting educational programming.

Concerns with survey responses

- We do not have an ag agent in our county at this time. The info submitted came from clients and from our local game and fish commission.
- There have not been any reports to our office or agents of damage caused by feral hogs. I suspect there was some damage caused. I expect feral hogs to become more of an issue in time.

Other

- Thank you for the opportunity to educate the public on new laws.

Summary

Although almost three-fourths (72%) of all counties reported problems with feral hogs, almost half (47%) indicated feral hogs were a relatively minor agriculture issue at this time, according to county Extension agents in

Arkansas. Certainly there were “hot spots” throughout the state, with twelve counties indicating feral hogs were a major issue. The most prevalent type of agriculture damage was to pastures, with many counties reporting “a little” timber, crop, and/or equipment damage. A couple counties reported feral hogs caused “a lot” of crop damage and/or cost over \$250,000 in monetary losses. These same counties reported overall, feral hogs were a minor agriculture issue, and therefore feral hog damage appeared to occur as localized events in their county.

Feral hogs are like many cyclical problems producers encounter, such as drought, floods, and plant/livestock diseases. Some agents indicated fluctuations in feral hog populations create a dynamic where damage problems are more prevalent some years than others. Another agent indicated successful control measures have reduced damage issues with feral hogs for the time being, but these methods must be continued to prevent damage problems from returning. Producers with property near state and federal lands are particularly susceptible to feral hog damage as these secluded habitats harbor feral hogs which

periodically enter and cause damage on their properties.

Many agents were somewhat familiar with the new capture and transport regulations, and almost all were interested in conducting educational programs about feral hogs. Those remaining indicated if or when feral hogs became a major issue in their county, they would also be interested in conducting educational programs about feral hogs.

DISCLAIMER: Results from this survey are the opinions and perceptions of county Extension agents about feral hogs. Although county agents are very active and aware of issues in their counties, these results do not represent producers or agriculture impacts of feral hog damage. The reported monetary values do not in any way reflect a true economic analysis of feral hog problems. This study was designed to report county agents’ perceptions, and therefore these results are only indicators of actual feral hog problems and issues in the state.

APPENDIX

2013 Feral Hog Damage Estimates: UACES County Questionnaire

The Arkansas Agriculture Department requested that Dr. Windham provide an estimate of agricultural damage caused by feral hogs from county extension agents across the state. Each county staff chair is asked to complete the following brief questionnaire. If there is more than one agriculture agent in your county, please collaborate and report responses in a single questionnaire from your county. Please enter your responses by December 6, 2013. We apologize for the short turnaround, but the questionnaire is brief!

Go online when ready to complete the survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LW36JPN>. Use the questions below to help prepare for entering your responses. Questions? Contact Becky McPeake, RMcPeake@uaex.edu, 501-671-2285.

Survey Questions on SurveyMonkey:

1. What county are you reporting for? _____
(Name of County)

2. Did feral hogs cause problems in your county this past year? (Check one box.)

Yes No Don't know

3. To what extent did feral hogs cause any of these problems in your county this past year?
(Place an X inside the box corresponding to the degree a type of feral hog damage is a problem in your county.)

Type of feral hog damage	How much of a problem in your county			
	A lot	A little	None at all	Don't know
Crop damage				
Pasture damage				
Timber or forest damage (e.g., seedling or sapling damage, scaring trees)				
Landscape or turf damage				
Equipment damage (e.g., fencing, feeders, tractor damage from rutted fields, collision)				
Water contamination from rooting or wallowing (e.g., sedimentation, fecal)				
Disease transmission to livestock or people				
Livestock aggravation				
Wildlife habitat damage/population impacts				
Other:				

4. About how many clients in your county had problems with feral hogs this past year? (If no clients had problems with feral hogs, enter "0.") _____ (Number)

5. Please estimate total monetary losses from feral hog problems in your county this past year. (Check one box.)

- No monetary loss.
- \$1 to \$10,000
- \$10,001 to \$50,000
- \$50,001 to \$100,000
- \$100,001 to \$250,000
- More than \$250,000
- Don't know

6. Select the statement which best describes the importance of feral hogs and problems they cause as an agricultural issue in your county. (Check one box only.)

- Feral hogs were the most important issue this year.
- Feral hogs were a major issue, but not the most important issue this year.
- Feral hogs were a minor issue this year.
- Feral hogs were not an issue this year, but could be in the next 5 years.
- Feral hogs were not an issue this year and probably won't be in the next 5 years.
- None of the above.

7. New legislation became effective in August 2013 regarding capture and transport of feral hogs. How knowledgeable are you of rules and regulations regarding feral hogs? (If there is more than one agriculture agent in your county, indicate the highest level of knowledge.)

- Very knowledgeable
- Somewhat knowledgeable
- Slightly knowledgeable
- Not at all knowledgeable
- Don't know

8. How interested are you in conducting Extension education programs about methods for feral hog control? (If there is more than one agriculture agent in your county, indicate the highest level of interest.)

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Slightly interested
- Not at all interested
- Don't know

9. Thank you for responding to this information request. Please add any comments in the space below.