

NOBLE NEWS & VIEWS



WILDLIFE

High-Tech Traps Are Worth the Investment

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Feral hogs have plagued agricultural lands in Oklahoma for long enough that most landowners have adopted some sort of control strategy on their properties. Many natural resource management experts recommend an integrated approach as a best practice to control feral hogs. An integrated approach uses many different control strategies in unison to have a cumulative population reduction. But is the continued use of some techniques causing more harm than actually reducing populations?

CHEAPEST AND EASIEST IS NOT ALWAYS BEST

From my experience working with landowners and land management entities, I have found that many control campaigns start with the cheapest or easiest available option. For example, a landowner may use hunting as their first line of defense because they already own a rifle and box of ammunition. Or a landowner may use a box trap because the welding shop down the road has one for \$300. Often, control strategies like the aforementioned are conducted for recreation

instead of management. When used to control feral hog populations, they are among the least effective options.

Using conventional animal-activated box and corral traps may present new problems after initial trapping efforts. Consider a sounder (group) of hogs approaching a box trap. The average-sized box trap can capture only a handful of hogs, at best. When a portion of the sounder enters the trap and triggers the gate, the naive segment of the sounder is captured, leaving the wary (trap-shy) segment on the land. Because of this, feral hog populations continue to become more wary than the previous generation and harder to capture.

Many producers balk at the price tag on high-tech, human-activated traps, but perhaps these techniques are justified. Many of the high-tech traps are capable of capturing entire sounders when users follow best management practices and are disciplined to delay trap activation until all of the hogs enter the trap.

SO IS A \$6,000 TO \$8,000 TRAP WORTH THE INVESTMENT?

In a research study conducted here at the Noble Research Institute, researchers demonstrated that intensive trapping with such traps reduced rooting damage by 90 percent. In a scenario where several acres of wheat is unable to be harvested due to feral hog damage, the reduction in revenue on a crop that yields 30 bushels per acre at a price of \$3.50 or \$6.50 per bushel would cost the producer \$105 and \$195 per acre, respectively. In 35 bushel per acre of soybeans, at a price of \$8.50 or \$11.00 per bushel, losses are expected to be \$300 and \$385 per acre, respectively. Many producers aren't just managing one commodity, so these losses stack up and are expected annually if feral hog populations persist.

Specialty crops, such as pecans, are another major group of agricultural crops that receive damage and depredation from feral hogs. In a recently completed study, researchers from the Noble Research Institute and Oklahoma State University used GPS collars to track feral hog use in pecan orchards. Preliminary data suggest that feral hog rooting in pecan orchards can result in greater economic losses (\$870 per acre) than the aforementioned commodities. Further results from this study will be highlighted in the November issue of Noble News and Views, along with economic loss data that will be built into an online calculator for estimating losses because of pecan harvester efficiency.

HIGH-TECH TRAPS CAPTURE MORE FERAL HOGS

Feral hogs impose significant economic burdens on both crop and livestock producers. It is often assumed that a high-tech trap is just a Cadillac type of trap for the user who wants a cool, new toy. Some producers may see it as an expense that will not be recovered, but these human-activated technologies are actually a more



BOARBUSTER TRAPS

116 HOGS PER TRAP AVERAGE IN 2017

The BoarBuster suspended corral trap is one high-tech control option capable of removing 88 percent of a feral hog population. In 2017 alone, reporting BoarBuster users in Oklahoma captured 3,724 hogs in 32 traps.

effective tool to mitigate damages long-term and save money. High-tech traps can reduce populations by more than 80 percent. Because conventional traps are animal activated, 50 percent is an ambitious population reduction goal that is not likely to be met. Producers removing 80 percent of a population will extend the time before feral hogs re-invade because hogs have to immigrate, not just reproduce, to fill the void in the short-term. Producers trapping only 50 percent of a population typically continue to experience significant damage expenses every year. 🐷