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Clean Out the Rats!

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ARE YOU PAYING room and board for 5,000 rats? Are you losing $10,000 down rat holes each year? Some farmers lose this much and are not even aware of it. Rats are so secretive that you will be surprised at the amount of damage they are doing on your farm—here is a quick way to estimate it.

If you never see rats, but see signs of rats and rat damage, there are from 1 to 100 rats on your farm. If you see rats occasionally at night, there are from 100 to 500 rats. If you see rats every night and a few occasionally in the daytime, you are boarding from 500 to 1,000 rats. If you see lots of rats at night and several every day, you probably have 1,000 to 5,000 rats.

Now then, with each rat costing you fully $2 each year for living expenses, you can easily determine just how big a hotel bill you are paying.

Rats do a terrific amount of damage on the average Iowa farm. Because of this waste, rat control will play an important part in our war effort. Three rats eat as much as two laying hens. One hundred rats will eat 100 bushels of corn, and they will destroy and contaminate an additional 300 bushels each year. Rats undermine and destroy foundations and feeding floors. They chew holes in crib roofs and crib slats. And they also give hogs a serious disease—trichinosis.

All of this sabotage continues unchecked on most farms, even in the face of the national war emergency, which calls for highly increased production of feed and livestock while at the same time curtails the construction of farm buildings. In any case it will pay each individual farmer to control rats.

Many farmers refuse to believe that rats are bleeding their pocket-books because they have seen only a few signs of rats or because they have seen only one or two at night. Actually rats very rarely venture from their nests except at night and are very shy of humans. In fact, you won’t see a rat at all unless it is forced out of its home by sheer pressure of high population.

By HAROLD GUNDERSON
Tie Census First

Rat control, in the minds of too many people, is a minor job that needs to be done only once or at most twice during the year. But a good job calls for constant alertness, continual planning and periodic slaughter of rats. In general, best results are obtained during the fall and spring months. In late fall the rats move into your farm buildings for their winter quarters and will be on hand when you get ready to poison them. In the spring, when the breeding season begins, rats are hungry for any kind of food, and thus are very susceptible to baiting. Effective control during summer and winter months will call for a little more skill and painstaking care, but the results can be just as good.

The first thing to do in rat control is to take a rat census. This can be done roughly through observation, as has already been outlined. On the basis of this census you can start prebaiting—that is, putting out unpoisoned meat or fish. This is the most important step in rat control. In prebaiting, always assume that you are feeding the highest figure in the census range your farm falls into. If you never see rats but have some damage, prebait for 100 rats by distributing 1 pound of meat or fish.

Always pick up the uneaten baits the next morning.

Prebaiting serves several purposes. First, it accustoms rats to the food. Second, it tells you where the rats are congregated. Third, it gives you some idea of how many you have. The meat should be

Right: Rats can ruin a lot of corn. It has been estimated that 100 rats will eat 100 bushels a year and contaminate an additional 300 bushels of the grain.

Below: Cyanide pumped into their runs with a "gun" accounted for this kill.

Rats find corncribs of this type excellent places in which to live. This picture was taken at night and shows only a few of the many rats that were running about.
spray or sprinkle the surface of the ground around the chicken house with creosote oil. Use plenty of creosote and see to it that the foot of ground next to the wall is well soaked. Rats don’t like creosote and will leave this area if there are no other hiding places in the immediate vicinity.

Pile all lumber, fenceposts, wagon boxes and other farmyard objects on sawhorses 18 inches to 2 feet off the ground to destroy all possible rat hideouts. Clean up the empty cans, scrap metal and other junk around the yard. Make the rats find new homes. See to it that chicken feed and livestock feed are not available to them at any time. Over a period of 3 to 5 days you are, therefore, concentrating the rats into a few colonies where they can be poisoned more easily.

Don’t use too much cyanide, and don’t shoot too frequently at rats during this period or you may actually drive most of the rats away from your buildings for a short time. Your purpose is to get rid, permanently, of as many of them as you can.

Feed Them Poison

Now comes the big day—you are all set to slaughter your rats. You have found through prebaiting that the rats on your farm will eat about 10 pounds of ground meat every night and that they are concentrated in and around the corncrib. So you mix 10 pounds of meat and 2 pounds of barium carbonate together thoroughly and make 1,200 individual baits, each about ¾ inch in diameter. Next you round up and pen safely all of your livestock and pets because barium carbonate is poisonous to all animals, and we don’t want any accidents.

Twilight comes, and the rats are hungry. You quickly distribute the 1,200 baits—enough baits so that each rat can eat at least one without fighting off his neighbors. Each bait contains enough poison so that if the rat eats only half of it, he will die. When the baits are distributed, leave the area and don’t come back until morning. You don’t want to scare or disturb the rats before they have eaten their fill. If you do, most of the rats will just get sick, hide out for a few days and then be back as strong as ever.

Early the next morning go out and pick up all uneaten baits. Don’t be surprised if there seem to be quite a lot of them left. Remember that a rat with a stomach-ache can’t eat as much as one that is in good health.

Since barium carbonate is a slow-acting poison, you probably won’t find a large number of dead rats the first day. But you will pick up dead ones for a week after the poisoning. These should be buried where no other animal can get at them. Probably less than 50 percent of the rats will die in the open, so the odor may be a trifle unpleasant for a few days. But your farm will be quieter than it has been for a long time.

You are still a long way from finished with rat control. Now you should start repairing foundations, closing rat holes and burrows around all your buildings, gassing in favorable places with cyanide or car exhaust gas, and shooting stray rats. The first baiting can be expected to kill from 50 percent to 90 percent of the rats on the farm. So there is still some work left to do.

About 10 days after the first poisoning, start prebaiting again. Use a different bait this time. If you first baited with ground meat, bait with ground fish now. Prebait for at least three nights and then poison again. Since barium carbonate is tasteless and odorless, you can use it again, but best results will probably be obtained by using a different poison. Red squill is good if you can obtain the full strength, pure powder. It is poisonous only to rats, but it is still a good idea to lock up the livestock.

A third baiting is sometimes necessary, especially on heavily infested farms. Prebaiting should be started 10 to 15 days after the second poisoning. Change the bait again since the rats now left on the farm are probably the strongest ones and the hardest to kill.

Once your foundations are repaired and your farmyard is free of junk, lumber piles and garbage, you can keep your farm free of rats by encouraging your dog to seek out and catch stray rats, by occasional shooting and by prebaiting and poisoning spring and fall. Make this practice part of your regular farming routine. You will save money by doing so.

Lime Helps Corn

The average Iowa farmer with acid soil can expect an increase of 5 bushels an acre in corn yields from applying lime to correct the acidity, tests conducted cooperatively by the Iowa Station with farmers in their fields over a period of 15 to 20 years indicate.

Corn is not sensitive to the acidity in soils, but when a soil is acid it does not grow most legumes well. As a result, many of these fields become low in nitrogen. A good corn crop requires rather large amounts of nitrogen. By liming just before legumes are seeded, the legumes are given a large “lift,” and with a large and vigorous legume growth, the nitrogen is built up—preparing for larger corn crops.

Soil testing to determine just how much lime is needed on various fields can be done by the county extension director (county agent), the local vocational agriculture instructor, or the farmer may take samples and send them in to the Soils Department, Iowa State College, Ames.

The fineness of lime is important in determining its value. Coarse lime is slow in neutralizing acidity in soil.