

FERAL HOGS: WHOSE PROBLEM ARE THEY?

By Greg Pleasant TPWD Biologist

Texas potentially has one of the largest feral hog populations in the world. Estimates range from 1 to 3 million. No one knows for sure, due to low detection rates and high mobility. Feral hogs have been present in Texas for over 200 years, but have recently dramatically increased. Feral hogs now occur in 24 states in the U. S. and have spread from 462 counties in 1988 to 1,042 counties by 2004, an increase of 125% in 16 years.

Feral hogs cause damage in many forms including loss of livestock and wildlife feed, rooting, fences, crops, and damage to farm equipment. I often hear people ask when is the state going to do something about feral hogs? The news is the state is not going to fix this problem for you. There is not going to be a bounty on feral hogs. There is not going to be a legal poison or chemical sterilization in the near future. If you want something done about feral hogs you, the landowner, are going to have to have to do it yourself. We need to start working together and working smarter.

Trapping is probably the single most effective method of removing hogs that we have for this area. There is no hope of eliminating them completely. Unfortunately, they are here to stay, but their numbers can be greatly reduced along with the damage they do. Trapping correctly is the key to success. Most hogs travel in large family groups. So, the objective should be to catch all the pigs in the group at one time. Using small traps makes catching the whole herd much less likely and risks educating the pigs that did not get captured. There are places where box traps have there place, they will certainly catch pigs of all sizes, they are often less expensive and are easy to hall and relocate, but are not the best tool for the job if reducing hog numbers on a large scale is the objective. If you only have a few hogs they are probably fine.

Trap Location:

You can get pigs to come to your trap but it is usually quicker to move the trap to the pigs. Find where the pigs are traveling, either from bedding areas or your neighbors property, and put the trap near there. I do not recommend putting the trap in the middle of your hay pasture just because that's where the damage was done last night. **Pre-baiting your trap for as long as it takes to get the entire herd comfortable entering the trap before you set it is the key to successfully trapping the whole heard.** In so doing you are likely to encourage the pigs to spend more time in the vicinity of the trap before you catch them. The middle of your hay pasture is not where you want them. If you are planning on selling the pigs you catch, you need to be able to get a trailer to the trap in all weather.

The more pigs you have in your area the larger your trap should be. In a larger trap a group of pigs are less likely to panic and go crashing through the corral walls if they have room to move away from you, and more hogs will feel comfortable entering. Your trigger needs to be far enough away from the gate or set in a way that all the pigs have time to enter the trap before the first pig to the bait can trigger the gate to close.

Cost estimate for a large teardrop corral trap in May 2007 from the Lee County General Store.

10, 60" X 20' utility panels (4" x 4" mesh) at \$46.50 = \$465.

5 t-posts per panel, plus 5 more to string trip wire (55) 6.5' t-posts at \$3.75 = \$206.25

A trap gate purchased from the Lee County Wildlife Management Association \$75.00.

Total trap cost is \$746.25.00

Cost estimate for a small teardrop trap

7 utility panels (4" x 4" mesh) at \$46.50 = 325.50

5 t-posts per panel, plus 4 more to string trip wire (39) 6.5' t-posts at \$3.75 = \$146.25

A trap gate purchased from the Lee County Wildlife Management Association \$75.00.

Total trap cost is \$546.75

Cost for small circle corral trap (used when not trailering hogs)

5 utility panels (4" x 4" mesh) at \$46.50 = 232.50

5 t-posts per panel, plus 2 more to string trip wire (27) 6.5' t-posts at \$3.75 = \$101.25

A trap gate purchased from the Lee County Wildlife Management Association \$75.00.

Total trap cost is \$408.75

Five foot utility panels are a must. Do not even bother with a four foot panel.

Justification for the expense:

Pigs can die very quickly in the heat with out shade or water, so once you set a trap you must check it every morning. Using a large corral trap and pre-baiting you can greatly reduce the amount of time you spend checking on traps compared to number of hogs captured. If you are selling your hogs, you will also have more hogs per trip. This saves time and gas. This trap my cost you more money up front, but you should make up the difference quickly in time and miles driven. At May 2007 hog prices **it will only take you a few large hogs to re-coop the trap expense.** Example five, 251lb. hogs would yield you \$702.50 at 50 cents per pound and a \$15 head bonus.

Baiting:

Corn is as good as anything for baiting hogs. There are dozens of recipes for soured corn with sugar, yeast, and raspberry or strawberry jello. Over time it probably wouldn't hurt to change up your bait to entice stubborn hogs to enter a trap but it is probably not necessary. You can place a feeder inside your trap to further reduce the number of trips you have to make to the trap to pre-bait. A five gallon bucket feeder would work fine or even cheaper, a piece of 4" diameter perforated PVC sewer pipe with a cap on each end will slow down raccoons and crows from eating your bait. Burying corn in post holes is another way to keep bait in the trap longer and keeps soured corn from drying out.