

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
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Factsheet

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Assistance to Dairy Farms and Facilities



Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

Using an integrated approach, WS assists dairy producers in resolving problems associated with large bird populations, predators, and disease transmission, among other damage.

Every State in the Nation produces milk, one of the country's most valuable agricultural products. The number of dairy farms, overwhelmingly family-owned and managed, has declined significantly since 1970. Dairy farming and the local economies in dairy production areas rely on efficient and responsive management practices to remain viable. Wildlife-related damage problems can cause serious challenges to farmers in areas where wildlife populations impact crops and feed, as well as animal health.

Dairy producers turn to WS for assistance in safeguarding their herds' health and safety as well as to minimize the production costs.

Bird Damage at Dairies

Birds of many species congregate at dairies and feedlots, especially during winter months. Those most frequently associated with damage problems at dairies are European starlings, pigeons, sparrows, grackles, cowbirds, and vultures.

Birds consume and contaminate livestock feed with dual impact, reducing milk production and increasing feed and medical costs. For example, 1,000 starlings can eat about 36–40 pounds of food per day. Because birds concentrate on the high protein portion of dairy cow feed, they deprive cows of proper nutrition, resulting in decreased milk production. Additionally, bird droppings in feed and water can transmit harmful diseases and reduce feed consumption. Bird feces on buildings and equipment can shorten their useful life and increase cleanup costs.

Upon request, WS can provide on-site assistance to dairies and feedlots where over-abundant birds are causing damage. Plans to reduce damage may include recommendations for exclusion, harassment, or lethal removal. A variety of netting, repellants, and scaring devices may be tried to deter the birds.

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Local bird populations can be reduced through several methods including traps. The avian toxicant DRC-1339 represents another option for use by trained and certified WS' specialists. Environmentally sound, DRC-1339 can target the problem birds without harming people, pets, or other wildlife.

Livestock Predation

Predators, such as wolves, coyotes, bears, and black vultures, can prey on cows and calves at dairy facilities. Not all predators kill livestock, but even infrequent losses to predation can have a major impact on dairies.

WS provides information and assistance, including recommendations and use of integrated management programs to reduce or eliminate predation. Trained specialists can investigate which predator species is responsible for depredation and recommend possible nonlethal management methods.

Annually, predators can take more than one-half million head of cattle, sheep, and goats valued at more than \$126 million, according to the most recent reports of the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Coyotes are the most common predator of lambs, calves, and kids.

Some regions of the country are seeing increased reports of black vulture predation on newborn livestock. WS researchers are working to identify the factors associated with this predation. Constant vigilance, sound husbandry practices, and persistent harassment are the most effective means to protect livestock from black vultures, which are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and State laws.

Wolves have made a strong comeback in the Western Great Lakes and Northern Rocky Mountains. While the expanding wolf population is an ecological success story, it creates challenges for farmers and ranchers.

WS, in cooperation with wildlife management agencies, can assist farmers that experience suspected livestock predation. When regulations allow, staff also can conduct or advise on lethal removal of predators where farmers are experiencing loss.

Federal and State laws and regulations vary by species and location. WS can provide more information and refer farmers to appropriate agencies for permits.

Bovine Tuberculosis

USDA research has demonstrated that white-tail deer can transmit bovine tuberculosis (TB) to one another and to cattle through feed. WS personnel are dedicated to helping producers prevent the spread of bovine TB. In some States, through a Federal/State cooperative program, they can assist eligible farms to obtain fencing to keep deer out of stored feed. Staff can remove infected deer under disease management permits. WS researchers from the National Wildlife Research Center also carry out research to prevent the transmission of bovine TB between wildlife and cattle.

Additional Information

For more information about managing wildlife damage at dairy farms, or other WS operations, please call 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or visit the Web site at: www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/.



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