



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA ANNOUNCES EPA REGISTRATION OF GONACon™ IMMUNOCONTRACEPTIVE VACCINE FOR WHITE-TAILED DEER

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3, 2010--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Service's (WS) National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) today announced that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has granted regulatory approval for the use of GonaCon™ immunocontraceptive vaccine in female white-tailed deer one year of age and older.

"Overabundant white-tailed deer can cause damage to wildlife habitats and residential landscapes, and pose risks to human health and safety through deer-car collisions and the spread of Lyme disease," said NWRC director, Larry Clark. "Following more than a decade of research with this technology in deer, we are delighted this new product will be available to potentially play an important complimentary role in locations or situations where traditional wildlife management methods are not routinely feasible."

The single-shot, multiyear vaccine stimulates the production of antibodies that bind to the gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) in an animal's body. GnRH signals the production of sex hormones (e.g., estrogen, progesterone and testosterone). By binding to GnRH, the antibodies reduce GnRH's ability to stimulate the release of these sex hormones. All sexual activity is decreased, and animals remain in a nonreproductive state as long as a sufficient level of antibody activity is present.

There is no known danger associated to humans or wildlife from eating deer that have been vaccinated with GonaCon. As with other vaccines, such as those used with livestock, both the vaccine and the antibodies produced are proteins. Once ingested, they are broken down by stomach acids and enzymes.

GonaCon is registered as a restricted-use pesticide, and all users must be certified pesticide applicators. Only USDA-WS or state wildlife management agency personnel or individuals working under their authority can use it. In order for GonaCon to be used in any given state, it must also be registered with the state and approved for use by the state fish and game/natural resource agency.

GonaCon will be available for purchase from WS beginning in January 2010. However, addressing GonaCon requests could take several more weeks to months before state registration and approval policies are in place.

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The use of GonaCon alone cannot rapidly reduce overabundant deer populations to healthy levels. Instead, it is a tool that can be used in conjunction with other wildlife management methods, particularly in urban, residential areas and parks where other management methods, such as hunting, are not routinely feasible.

Future NWRC research with GonaCon will likely involve studies to support expanded registration to other species (e.g., prairie dogs, wild horses and feral dogs), develop oral delivery systems and prevent transmission of wildlife diseases.

WS-NWRC is the federal institution devoted to resolving problems caused by the interaction of wild animals and society. The center applies scientific expertise to the development of practical methods to resolve these problems and to maintain the quality of the environments shared with wildlife. To learn more about NWRC, visit its Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/nwrc/.

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