

CONTROLLING STARLING DAMAGE AT FEEDLOTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

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Damage

There are well over 160 million starlings in the US, and they are found in rural, suburban and urban areas in a variety of habitats. They consume seeds and fruits of wild and cultivated plants, insects and other invertebrates, livestock (feed) grains, and garbage. Starling damage occurs in several forms on dairy farms and cattle feedlots:



1. Consumption of cattle feed can cause considerable economic losses since starlings can consume up to 50% of their body weight in grain each day.
2. Fecal contamination of cattle feed and drinking water can create disease hazards for cattle, especially calves and pregnant cows.
3. Fecal contamination, nesting materials and bird carcasses on and in structures and farm equipment such as dispenser pumps, grinder/mixers, augers, and vehicle engines, can hamper farm operation and cause costly property damage.

All of these activities may result in increased operating costs from replacement of feed, equipment repairs, structural maintenance costs, fire suppression, reduced milk production by cows in response to the noise and other impacts of bird control techniques (such as pyrotechnics), and veterinary charges associated with actual or suspected livestock illness or disease problems.

Damage Control Methods

Starlings may be lethally controlled without Federal or State permits, but certain methods of take (firearms, toxicants, traps) may require specific authorizations from State and/or local authorities.

1. Habitat Management. Farm management programs that reduce starling habitat (food, water, shelter/nesting areas) and/or starling access to food and nesting resources are the best long-term solution to the problem.
 - Clean up spilled grain and store in bird proof containers.
 - Use feed that starlings cannot swallow, such as cubes or blocks greater than .5" in diameter.

Eliminate use of 3/16" pellets, since starlings can consume these six times faster than granular feed.

- Do not "top dress" silage; instead, mix supplements and grain products with other rations.

- Lower water levels in drinking troughs to no more than 6" from the top, so starlings cannot reach the water while perching on the rim.

- Wherever possible, install PVC stripping in doorways to feeding areas and repair holes greater than 1".

2. Harassment

Harassment of starlings with pyrotechnics (noise making devices shot from a pyrotechnics pistol or shotgun) may be effective in scaring birds away if it is initiated early in the day and early in the damage season and it is done persistently. The high numbers of birds and the very attractive nature of feedlots often make use of pyrotechnics unfeasible and expensive.

3. Population Management

A. *Trapping*. Decoy traps are the most common traps used in starling control. In the feedlot situation, a decoy trap placed near the usual feeding site can capture several hundred starlings in a day.



B. *Avicide*. DRC-1339 Concentrate is a restricted use pesticide for reducing offending blackbird populations. This pesticide is restricted for use only by USDA employees. The method requires several days of prebaiting to condition birds to the bait, monitor for non-target species, and evaluate safety considerations. Once prebaiting is accomplished, the toxicant may be placed on a variety of bait options, including corn, fat nuggets, rolled barley and rice. The toxicant takes approximately 24 hours to reduce the offending blackbird population. Carcasses are then removed by USDA employees and/or cooperators. DRC-1339 Concentrate is a safe effective population management solution. It is highly target-selective and causes no secondary poisoning effects on scavengers.

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