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KEYNOTE ADDRESS—CHANGING TIMES FOR ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL

JAMES O. LEE, Jr., Deputy Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

Times do change! USDA's Animal and Plant Health Service, or APHIS, is now in the process of taking over the animal damage control program from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The transfer will be completed by April 1.

This is the opposite of what was happening back in 1939. At that time, a government reorganization plan resulted in the transfer of the Bureau of Biological Survey--forerunner of Fish and Wildlife Service--from Agriculture to Interior; and with it went the ADC program.

We're pleased to have the ADC program back at Agriculture. We never lost interest in it. While the program was at Interior, the Agricultural Research Service contributed to ADC projects such as those on guarding dogs and improved coyote attractants. The Extension Service provided ADC training and instructions to farmers and ranchers. USDA's Economic Research Service conducted studies on agricultural losses caused by depredated animals.

YESTERDAY

But let's look back for a moment to the early days. We're inclined to think of the ADC program as beginning in 1931 when the Animal Damage Control Act was passed. But USDA was involved with animal damage control long before then. More than a hundred years ago, in 1885, records show that USDA officials sent a questionnaire to farmers inquiring about bird damage to crops. Two years later, a letter was mailed to farmers informing them of ways to reduce losses to ground squirrels.

From 1888 to 1914, the Department carried out several studies in animal control. In 1911, for example, a bulletin on fences to exclude predators was published. In 1916, USDA's Bureau of Biological Survey began building a field force to control predatory animals in principal western livestock-producing states. From then until 1931, USDA cooperated extensively with states and other organizations to control animal damage.

The Act of March 2, 1931, authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a cooperative program to reduce losses caused by predatory animals, birds, and rodents. In those days, the program not only protected livestock and crops, but desirable species of wildlife as well. Predators were considered a liability to the wildlife resource, and predator control was an inherent part of the wildlife manager's job.

In 1939, ADC became a responsibility of the Secretary of Interior. In the view of many people, however, that responsibility began to conflict with Interior's role in wildlife conservation. To quote one pundit, it appeared that "putting ADC in a fish and wildlife organization made as much sense as putting weed control under supervision of the national arboretum."

But in all fairness, many people believe there's little or no evidence that killing coyotes reduces livestock losses. They suggest that control programs kill nontarget species and are otherwise environmentally unacceptable. Some believe the use of toxicants incurs too high a risk to the environment and to nontarget species. The use of toxicants is indeed controversial.

Because of its economic and environmental advantages, the Department of Agriculture supports and promotes the concept of integrated pest management in all attempts to reduce economic losses caused by vertebrate animals. The goal of the Department is to reduce damage where animal damage reduction is determined to be necessary for economic reasons and, if at all possible, without environmental harm.

According to a study by USDA's Economic Research Service, one of every nine lambs born in 15 western states during a recent year was killed by predators--primarily coyotes. Annual losses to agriculture from various depredated animals--such as blackbirds, rodents, and coyotes--were estimated at more than 300 million dollars. That was reason enough for USDA to maintain its interest in ADC.

The 1922 Yearbook of Agriculture contains this interesting statement, and I quote: "Similar to the warfare against Plant and animal diseases and insect pests is the struggle to control predatory animals and rodent pests." We at APHIS would have to agree with that assessment. Our basic mission is "Protecting American agriculture," and ADC fits in with that mission very well indeed.

TODAY

USDA always has been quick to defend the need for an ADC program. But with backing by the livestock industry, Secretary Block began actively exploring a return of the program to Agriculture in 1981. He took up the matter--first with Interior Secretary Watt, then with Secretary Clark, and finally with Secretary Hodel.

With a nod from the President's Office of Management and Budget, and Secretary Hodel's agreement not to object, Congressional proponents of a transfer pursued the necessary legislation by two routes--the farm bill and the Agriculture funding measure. It was actually the latter--the Continuing Resolution--passed by Congress and signed by the President on December 19, 1985, that achieved the transfer.

Strictly speaking, the transfer occurred October 1, with Interior continuing to manage the program until the transition is completed.

The transfer included all personnel, property, records, and funding for the ADC program. On the other hand, responsibility for administering laws protecting bald and golden eagles and other endangered species remains at Fish and Wildlife Service; and this is as it should be.

In transferring the ADC program to Agriculture, Congress set current funding at about \$20 million. I want to tell you, however, that this was before reductions brought about by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act. All APHIS programs may have to take a cut of about 4.3% during this fiscal year. More drastic cuts may come later.

Funding provisions specifically include \$500,000 for ongoing research on ways to minimize losses caused by blackbirds. Some \$45,000 is for the guard dog program at Hampshire College. Provisions also include funding for research now underway on nonlethal predator control in California, Nevada, and Arizona. I understand that this project actually deals with taste aversion using lithium chloride in sheep-meat baits.

Altogether, about \$4.3 million is committed for research. This includes \$1.3 million for in-house research on bird damage and \$1 million for predators.

As noted, transfer of the ADC program from Interior to Agriculture is targeted for completion by April 1. Our immediate goal is a smooth and orderly transfer. Both APHIS and Fish and Wildlife Service have assigned transition teams, and they're working diligently to complete the transfer in good order. Let me say that Fish and Wildlife Service's cooperation has been excellent!

TOMORROW

Now don't expect to see dramatic changes come April 1. But we do have some positive thoughts on how to run ADC, and I'd like to share them with you. Keep in mind that we'll have three major areas of emphasis: cooperative operational control, research, and informational and educational efforts. The program will be managed from offices in Washington, D.C. We'll have a technical staff located nearby at Hyattsville, Maryland.

For the first time, the program will have a Secretary's advisory committee on ADC. This committee will advise the Secretary on policies and program issues necessary to control depredating animals that reduce agricultural production and nuisance animals at airports and urban areas. Having this committee will help improve coordination with producer groups and conservation organizations. People from all major groups with a stake in the program will sit together to discuss and recommend policy.

Other USDA agencies besides APHIS already have a role in this program. For that reason, we'll also have an intradepartmental policy committee on ADC chaired by APHIS. Other agencies represented will include Forest Service, Extension Service, Economic Research Service, Agricultural Research Service, and Cooperative State Research Service.

For those of you who are familiar with APHIS's present structure, ADC will be managed as a third major program area, separate and apart from our Veterinary Services and Plant Protection and Quarantine programs.

Currently, ADC field operations are carried out under several regional offices of Fish and Wildlife Service. APHIS will manage field operations from two regional offices only.

A line dividing eastern and western regions will coincide with the North Dakota-Minnesota border and extend southward. Everything is already in place for the western region to be headquartered in Denver. The eastern regional headquarters will be near Columbus, Ohio, as soon as we can get set up for it.

Some things won't change under APHIS. Cooperative and participatory features of this program will be preserved. APHIS has no desire to take over jobs already being well handled at the state, county, and community levels. Program structures within individual states will remain pretty much intact.

And to those of you who represent commercial pest control firms, let me assure you that APHIS has no plans to assume your roles either. We'll continue to count on a lot of people who've been making contributions to animal damage control over the years.

RESEARCH

Research will continue to play a vital part in the ADC program under APHIS, with the Denver Wildlife Research Center serving as the hub of ADC research. We'll be researching new control methods as well as more efficient and safe uses of present methods. We'll be looking into toxicants, repellents and attractants, biological controls such as reproductive inhibitors, and physical approaches such as fencing.

We support the concept of using chemical toxicants (including 1080) if not prohibited by other laws or regulations, and if they can be used safely without a significant threat to nontarget species and humans.

As most of you know, the livestock protection collar was recently registered by EPA. These collars will become available as soon as state pesticide regulatory agencies get state registrations and are ready to handle certification of applicators, together with training, distribution, and monitoring of collar use. They'll be suitable for some sheep and goat raisers in some areas of the country.

Owners of graineries, feedmills, feedlots, orchards, and grain crops are not the only ones concerned about the bird and rodent threat. Urban communities have problems, too. Through research, we'll be looking for ways to update and improve the methods of controlling rodent and bird problems in urban areas.

The topic of urban problems with winter roosts of blackbirds and starlings was covered in a recent article in the Wall Street Journal. As the Journal article said: "For people in the South, bye-bye blackbird is a wish, not a song."

Airplane pilots, on the other hand, don't wish--they pray! Birds ingested by airplane engines cause \$25 to 40 million worth of damage a year, depending on value of engines affected. FAA records about 1,500 bird strikes annually.

Bird strikes don't often cause crashes; but when they do, it can be calamitous. Most strikes are by gulls, but migratory waterfowl--blackbirds and starlings--also figure in the problem. We'll be working closely with FAA on finding solutions.

APHIS cares about people. Bird strikes are just one example of ADC involving human health and safety. There are others, such as the need to control rabid animals.

APHIS also cares about animals. We favor painless, life-sparing approaches to control animal damage wherever and whenever possible. Through research, we'll be looking for nonlethal control devices and techniques that are both affordable and effective. Projects that achieve goals by attaining a favorable ecological balance through natural means will be looked on with special favor.

As this audience knows well, there are many areas of ADC research that need to be considered. Our objective will be to maintain a safe and effective ADC program that is biologically sound, environmentally acceptable, and economically feasible.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Now a few words about information and education. Remember Johnny Mercer's lyrics that say "You've got to accentuate the positive"? Well, the ADC program offers very positive benefits to agriculture and the public, and we want to tell about it!

We have nothing to hide. This program will operate in the full light of day, open to public scrutiny. Not all of it will be pretty, we know. But we'll want the public to see the methods we employ and what happens if we do nothing.

Educational materials will be targeted for the people who really need to know--the farmer, the rancher, the feedmill operator, the airport manager. And we'll be counting on the Extension Service to provide the kind of services they're noted for.

The Extension Service has wildlife specialists with special expertise in animal damage control. These individuals develop educational materials and programs on ADC for private landowners and managers in every state. In so doing, they evaluate all methods of controlling problems caused by a particular species. The educational materials and programs they develop incorporate the most practical, effective, species-selective, safe, and humane methods and procedures available.

Programs vary from state to state, depending on the magnitude of predation of livestock, crops, and wildlife, and the significance of these industries and resources to the local economy. They're implemented primarily through the educational system of county agents who provide group demonstrations and group training for persons with damage problems.

CONCLUSION

Those are just some of the plans we have for animal damage control in the months and years ahead. Before concluding, let me just briefly review my main points.

-- The program, designed to attain results, must be biologically sound, environmentally acceptable, and economically feasible.

-- All interest groups with a legitimate stake in the program will have a voice in policy decisions.

-- APHIS will not attempt to usurp the role of the states or the private sector.

-- The three main ingredients of the program will be cooperative operational control, research, and informational and educational efforts.

After a period of losing ground to wildlife damage in some areas, that trend is about to be reversed. We at APHIS know we can't do it alone, however. So let's all work together by latching onto the affirmative and accentuating the positive.