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BIRD PROBLEMS IN SOUTH CENTRAL UNITED STATES: STILL UNSOLVED

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Some of the problems that I am aware of are:

- I. Grain producers
 - A. Rice - sprout pulling – blackbirds
 - damage to standing grain - blackbirds
 - B. Grain sorghum - sprout pulling - blackbirds and crows
 -damage to grain - blackbirds
 - C. Corn - sprout pulling - blackbirds and crows
 - damage to ears - blackbirds
 - D. Fall-seeded wheat and oats - sprout pulling - blackbirds
- II. Other producers
 - A. Pecans - crows and blackbirds
 - B. Watermelons - crows
 - C. Livestock operations - blackbirds, Starlings, crows
- III. Homeowners - woodpeckers
- IV. Winter bird roosts - concentrations of blackbirds, starlings and robins with the noxious odors and filth that result and the possible public health problems that may develop.

Blackbird depredations vary considerably from year to year and from place to place. Further, changes in technology and in acreage of susceptible crops are rapid and have an effect on the extent of bird depredations. For instance, in Arkansas in 1970, 573, 000 acres were planted to rice. In 1974, the harvested acreage had risen to 725, 000 acres. This increased to 902, 000 acres in 1975 and decreased to 842, 000 acres in 1976 (Rice Millers' Association Report).

In 1975, grain sorghum was harvested on about 200, 000 acres in Arkansas. In 1976, this had risen to 300, 000 acres, and a 25% increase is projected for 1977. As rice and grain sorghum production moves up the Arkansas River Valley, towards Missouri, and into the southwestern part of the state, interesting and sometimes unexpected, bird problems develop.

Changes appear in the market place also. Changes in export demand and in supplies force producers to seek alternative crops. For years, bird control investigators have been encouraging producers to grow bird-resistant varieties. Many good varieties of bird-resistant grain sorghum were developed, but reports of poor feed conversion kept cropping up. Finally this year, the industry refused to accept bird resistant varieties.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has studied the blackbird-rice problem starting with work by Kalmbach in 1919 in Louisiana and since 1948 in Arkansas. A great deal of important information has been gathered about the blackbird population in southcentral U.S. A great deal of effort was also expended in finding a lethal bird roost control technique. This finally resulted in registration of PA-14. In view of our present understanding of the composition and movements of these birds, do we really believe that killing 10% of these birds with available techniques will help alleviate bird depredation to grains in this area?

The southcentral section of the U.S. has many blackbird winter roosts. The roost survey made in 1974-75 produced reports of 32 roosts in Arkansas (51, 435, 000 birds); 62 roosts in Louisiana (81, 565, 000 birds), and 20 in Mississippi (64, 600, 000). Many of the Texas roosts are located in the eastern part of the state. Birds move out from these roosts and may pull late-planted wheat and oats, harvest late-planted grain sorghum, and help themselves generously to hog and cattle rations. Those that linger on into April spend considerable time pulling early-planted rice. Really now, is PA-14 the best that we can offer to these producers?

Bird roosts are reported to be a possible public health problem since older roosts may become positive for *Histoplasma capsulation*. I believe this is true; and for some time, we have tried to urge municipalities into programs that do not allow a roost to remain in an area for more than two years. I wonder if PA-14 is, or should be, all we have to offer to alleviate this problem? Is it possible that, by our failure to address ourselves to finding some alternate solutions to these problems, we have painted ourselves into a corner?

Briefly, I feel that we have almost no materials or programs to offer for solution to bird problems which exist in southcentral U.S. Further, this situation is forcing us into a control program that we must have known would result in a storm of protest.

An article by George Wald was published in the October, 1976 issue of *Bio-science*. This article was a reprint from the February 29, 1976 issue of the *New York Times*. The following comments taken from this article may be relevant to us here.

"One of the prevalent myths of our time is that government policy is based on the best obtainable information--that if the government knows which policy will most promote the public welfare, it will adopt that policy. It is this belief that fosters the constant call for more research.

"In fact, almost the opposite is true. A policy having been decided on- -usually for economic or political reasons- -the information is sought that will support it. That is, information follows policy, rather than the other way around."

I sincerely hope that we do not find ourselves in this position.

DISCUSSION

Question: What is the status of PA-14 for bird control?

Pierce: PA-14 was registered by the Fish and Wildlife Service for use by the Fish and Wildlife Service only. A recent release indicated that if you had a problem in the state, a committee was to be established in that state which could request assistance from the FWS in using this lethal technique; this is the only lethal technique which has registration that I know of.

Question: Can the states themselves no longer get permission to use PA-14?

Pierce: No.

Smith: It was registered three years ago; it is available for use by people that are approved by the FWS. Public health people can use it if they have permission from the federal agency. They cannot legally purchase the material from the company and use it on their own.

Question: What is PA-14?

Pierce: It's an industrial surfactant called Tergitol manufactured by Union Carbide company. What I know most about it is what I was told by EPA, who promised that they would carry me to court if I used it on my own. The FWS told me on the phone last winter that it was under their full control. The reason I make this comment is that there are many problems. I don't want us to feel like we've solved them by finding a lethal roost control like PA-14.