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I appreciate the opportunity to appear before your group to express the views of the Department of Agriculture concerning animal damage control.

The Department of Agriculture strongly supports and recognizes the need for immediate animal damage control to reduce livestock losses.

It sees the need for--and supports--an animal damage control program that both uses existing methods and develops new and more selective ones and, at the same time, protects the environment.

Animal damage control is vitally important to the income of many livestock producers and other farm and forestry operators. USDA's Economics and Statistics Service estimates that annual losses to livestock producers attributable to coyotes is approximately $53 million. Recent data show that annual financial losses to the sheep industry alone approximate $24 million. Losses to consumers attributable to sheep or lamb predation approximate $4 million; consumer losses due to calf predation are about $169 million. Livestock producers must be able to prevent or control attacks by predators on their flocks and herds.

Animal damage control is also essential to disease and insect control. We must begin to think in terms of an integrated production system that includes management of all pests of plants and animals and including animal damage control.

The animal damage problem involves not only economics, but also the humane treatment of domestic livestock. The public takes for granted that livestock will be humanely treated. Producers treat their animals as well as they can, not only because it is good business, but also because they respect these animals and realize that they are totally dependent on their owners.

However, adequate protection of livestock from predators is not yet within the total capability of most producers. Still, when man domesticated animals, he took away their natural protective abilities and thus assumed the moral obligation to protect these domestic animals himself. Furthermore, this moral obligation involves all civilized people and not just livestock owners.

Some persons contend there is 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 possible, without environmental harm.

RESEARCH NEEDS

The Department's current animal damage control activities are based largely on the research of the Agricultural Research Service and the Cooperative States Research Service and cooperating universities.

Research provides crucial support not only to APHIS' animal damage control activities, but to all its other programs as well. To do its job well, APHIS must employ the most effective methodologies possible in its programs that research can come up with--and the animal damage control program is no exception.

An extensive, continuous research program is needed to keep livestock protection and wildlife management in proper perspective.

This research program should reflect work in an approach to animal damage control that includes:

--Toxicants, repellents, and attractants;
--Biological controls such as reproductive inhibitors;
--Physical approaches such as fencing and guard dogs;
--And other approaches such as resistant strains of livestock, predator prey population dynamics, and guidelines for the safe use of toxicants in the natural environment.

More extensive, integrated, and coordinated animal damage control research is needed. Relationships between control techniques, coyote population, predation losses, and other wildlife should be further defined and assessed. Research should continue on new control methods as well as on more efficient and safe use of present methods, including the use of certain toxicants in areas where other methods do not appear to provide sufficient control.

The Department of Agriculture's objective is to develop a safe and effective animal damage control program for agriculture which is environmentally sound.

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. This includes the use of toxic collars where they can be used effectively.

However, our goal is to develop and use other effective and more acceptable alternatives as soon as possible. We will encourage all research efforts directed toward the development of improved techniques using chemical toxicants to reduce the potential for harm to nontarget individuals and species.

The development of educational programs in which Cooperative Extension Service and local agencies are involved is coordinated with careful identification of problems, attitudes, and needs of intended audiences. All approved methods for controlling a particular species causing damage are evaluated. Educational materials, techniques, methods, and programs are then developed which incorporate the most practical, effective, species-selective, safe, and humane methods and procedures.

Programs are implemented primarily through the educational system of county extension agents who provide group demonstrations and group training for producers with damage problems.

In light of the above, it becomes obvious that managing an operational animal and damage control program in harmony with a viable livestock industry will be dependent upon a number of factors such as:

--Intensified research efforts;
--Realistic animal damage operational programs;
--Vigorous education and information efforts directed at both program recipients and critics;
--And strong cooperative relationships between the livestock industry, state organizations, and the Federal Government.

One of the more critical needs of an operational animal damage control program is producer involvement in devising control strategies. It is also important that producers understand what can be done and what cannot be done in an operational damage control program.

Another aspect of any livestock protection is that a wildlife management program should consider the agricultural losses which are precipitated by birds and rodents. The majority of bird problems in the United States dealing with agricultural losses occur in the area east of the Mississippi River.

Rodent damage is also predominantly an eastern United States phenomenon, except in cases of field rodents such as prairie dogs which cause damage to rangeland.

RULE OF REASON

Let me conclude with an appeal to the "Rule of Reason:"

--Clearly, man cannot have all he wants to consume and at the same time maintain a completely pure environment, a completely risk-free society.

The progress which has given Americans the highest standard of living anywhere has come as a result of man's use of science to alter the environment in order to improve upon what nature gave us.

Man has had to take reasonable risks necessary to make that progress possible.

If we are to continue to reap the benefits of technology in a time when the limits of our resources become more clear each day, we must first come to grips with just how we shall proceed to deal with our environmental idealism and our attitude toward risk.

If your meeting has one overriding objective it should be to contribute your expertise to help make public judgments about the use of technology.

Some reasonable risk is, of course, unavoidable. Yet means must be perfected for carefully assessing the degree of risk. This meeting can help by setting forth adequate mechanisms for balancing risk against the anticipated benefits when judgments are made about the use of technology.

Your charge at this meeting could well be consideration of a "Rule of Reason" in the use of technology and to develop criteria for its application.

In short--Reason must rule.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you.