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A GROWER'S VIEW OF VOLE CONTROL METHODS

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Barber Orchards has been an operating orchard since 1903. Our number one problem as far as pests are concerned has been the loss of trees due to mice -- pine and meadow vole.

In the 20's, 30's, and 40's, we consistently lost from 300 to 500 trees per year, even though we were putting out and using every known conventional bait station and bait known to the various states growing apples in a commercial way. We used poisoned oats, wheat, chufers, peanuts and apples which we placed in the runs and holes, as well as under one yard squares of tar paper, in glass containers and under sawmill slabs.

In spite of all our actual losses of dead trees, we were using bridge grafts and approach grafts to as many as 2,000 trees per year to help cut our losses. We were using all available labor to do this and often went as late as July doing this. This damage to the root systems lowered our production as much as 20 percent and increased our labor costs by a similar figure or even higher; in addition to the cost of buying new trees to replace trees of all ages, in most cases only 2 to 8 year old trees.

We have written, received and followed the advice of commercial orchardists in every apple growing state. But, our mainstay has been the research of Dr. Frank Horsfall of Virginia, who has practically devoted his lifetime to perfecting the control of mice in orchards.

At the present time, we are following a practice of a winter spray of Endrin, plus a spring and late summer baiting of poison grain. In other words, we are not eliminating field mice, only partly controlling them. We still have damage to the root system of our trees and lose some trees each year. A complete eradication is, we feel, impossible; but any control measure less than that now practiced would in a matter of years destroy our orchards.

North Carolina is now producing over 8 million bushels of apples per year in commercial orchards. It would be impossible for North Carolina to produce this volume without the control of mice. The production of this state has gone up nearly 300 percent since Endrin became available as a control; it could not have been attained otherwise. North Carolina now has trees in the ground and coming into production which will boost production to approximately 10 million bushels. To eliminate the poisoning of mice would spell the death knell of the apple industry in North Carolina and would result in millions of dollars of loss to commercial orchardists. It would also cost so much to produce apples, the public could not buy them.

To argue that poisoning of mice in orchards kills wildlife or is dangerous is unrealistic and unfounded. I live in a house surrounded by apple trees planted as close as 30 feet to my house. I have grown children and grandchildren who play under these trees. This house was built by my Father when I was four years old and I am now 71 and still living in

this house. There are 15 other houses in our orchards surrounded by apple trees. As many as 5 generations have been raised in these houses. No child or wildlife has been poisoned.

There are no less than 20 species of birds that build their nests and raise their young in our orchards. These include quail, doves, cardinals, tohees, wrens, juncos, titmice, nuthatches, catbirds, mockingbirds, grackles, blue jays, bluebirds, sparrows, woodpeckers, flickers to mention a few. Squirrels also raise their young within twenty feet of my house and all species of birds frequent my bird feeders during snows or when food is scarce.

According to published statistics, there are now greater numbers of most species of wildlife in the United States than when Columbus discovered America. There are exceptions, of course: the carrier pigeon, the condor, the whooping crane and the buffalo. This, in spite of a well-fed 220 million people and with agricultural exports amounting to 24 billion dollars in 1977.

The facts are, the United States is now the breadbasket of the world due to the scientific use of chemicals, fertilizers and the control of destructive pests. Every American farmer now produces food for about 56 people,many who know nothing of the methods of producing and harvesting food. I read nearly every word of about 14 agricultural publications in order to stay abreast of the latest scientific production.

I believe in the preservation of wildlife and like all farmers and orchard people, I have given liberally to the National Wildlife Federation. In fact, I still have a certificate presented from this organization.

The farm population of the United States and of North Carolina are the greatest protectors of wildlife. They have been isolated by the methods employed by the so-called protectors who produce no food nor fibre and some would expect every farmer's property to be a game preserve for their exploits. The same people who seek to preserve wildlife are the same ones who would destroy it for lack of food. The animals in our forests are dependent on the surplus of food, the healthy forests and grasses which are controlled by people and chemicals.

Pine mice and meadow mice are rodents and pests to all people who produce food. They are pests of far greater magnitude than rats that can be caught in traps and can be poisoned. Any view to the contrary will only be voiced by people who have never produced food or their jobs are dependent on their arbitrary views.

I have many birds and squirrels at my home just to say that I love and protect wildlife as does every farmer and I am one.

At the present, we have no proven substitute for Endrin. If production of food is to be maintained at our present volume and price, Endrin is our only solution until a better means of control is established and proven. We will be only too happy to use any better method of control.

R. N. Barber

R. N. Barber & Company