

## STARLING CONTROL

Starlings were brought into the United States from Europe. They were released in New York City in 1890 and 1891 by an individual who wanted to introduce to the United States all of the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's works. Since that time they have increased in numbers and spread across the country. They were first observed in Nebraska in 1930 and in Colorado in 1939. Today there are millions of starlings in every state. They can be very troublesome, especially in agricultural settings.

Starlings are attracted to dairy farms and feedlots where feed and shelter are readily available. Populations usually increase around farmsteads during winter months when snow cover limits access to food and water. Barns provide warm shelter on cold days, and feed mangers and bunkers provide an easy source of food. During winter, and even during the summer months, starlings consume and contaminate large quantities of feed intended for livestock.

A study in New York State revealed that 200 starlings may consume 175 pounds of grain each week and contaminate even more with their droppings. It is not uncommon to see flocks of starlings that far exceed 200 or even 2,000 birds. Where high protein supplements are added to feed rations, starlings often selectively eat the high protein portion. With feed costs at record high levels, it quickly becomes very pricey to feed flocks of hungry starlings.

Their droppings also contaminate feed, bedding and water intended for livestock. Starlings can be responsible for transferring disease from one livestock facility to another. Some Cache County producers are already having troubles with salmonella in dairy calves. The problem has been traced directly to starlings. Tests also show that the TGE (transmissible gastroenteritis) virus can pass through the digestive tract of starlings and be infectious in the starling feces. Additionally, birds may create fire hazards by nesting on light fixtures and wiring in barns.

Various methods are recommended to control damage caused by starlings. Starlings can be excluded from buildings if there are no openings larger than one inch. Heavy plastic strips hung in open doorways of farm buildings have been successful in some areas in excluding birds, while allowing people, machinery or livestock to enter. These strips may also be useful in protecting feed supplies such as commodity sheds. Starling roosting inside buildings can be deterred by covering the underside of the rafters with netting. Birds prefer landing on flat ledges inside and outside buildings. Some producers report success in reducing starling numbers by placing boards or metal coverings over ledges at 45 degree angles. Another practice that is helpful is lowering the water level in water troughs so starlings can't reach water when perched on the edge. At the same time water levels must be deep enough so starlings can't stand in it.

Starlings are not protected by federal or state law. When starling numbers are out of control, use of a starlicide such as DRC-1339 may be necessary. When

used according to label directions, DRC-1339 is highly toxic to starlings, blackbirds and magpies, but will not kill pigeons or house sparrows. Poisoned birds experience a slow, non-violent death, usually dying from one to three days after consuming treated feed. Most starlings die at their roosting site, though a few dead starlings may be found at the baiting site.

There is little potential for secondary hazards to non-target animals with DRC-1339, primarily due to the rapid metabolism of the compound. Cats or owls could be at risk only if their diets consist wholly of DRC-1339 poisoned starlings for more than 30 continuous days.

As a "restricted use" pesticide, DRC-1339 is applied in a highly controlled process and can only be used by certified U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees. Livestock owners who have a serious starling problem can call USDA Wildlife Services at 801-975-3315. We are not be able to use an unlimited amount of DRC-1339 within the county, but will do the best we can with the controlled resources that are available. The predator control assessment that is withheld each time producers sell livestock is used to help offset the cost of treatments.