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Using IPM Techniques to Improve Cooperator Effectiveness to Mitigate Damage Caused by Townsend Ground Squirrels

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Abstract:

The Townsend Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus townsendi* is a small gray squirrel found in Nevada and western Utah. This squirrel is considered a pest due to the damage it causes to alfalfa and other agronomic crops. The reduction in crop yields and the cost of controlling the squirrels is costing farmers in western Utah over \$100,000 annually. Current control programs such as shooting, flooding, treating with gopher bait and using fumigants have not been effective. For the past two years a program to educate land owners and introduce a new baiting program has been offered by the Utah State University Extension. The program consists of applying a pre-bait of oats several day prior to applying zinc phosphide (bait) in the spring, before the alfalfa greens up. To determine the effectiveness of the pre-baiting program we set up trials in 2009 and 2010. We selected 12 plots in 4 different fields. In each field there were 3 treatments: pre-baiting with oats and then applying the bait, applying only the bait and a control plot where there was no application of pre-bait or bait. Each plot was observed each day for 3 days before treatment and 3 days after treatment. Results of the two year trial showed that the plots that were pre-baited and then baited showed 71% control compared to 55% control on the bait only plots and 33% control on untreated plots. The farmers that have implemented this control program are reporting a reduction of ground squirrels in their fields.

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