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New accredited expertise available to help British farmers strengthen sustainability

The British farming industry has a new resource to call upon in pursuit of continuous improvement in sustainable food production. At the Oxford Farming Conference, the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) announced that 34 experienced rural pest controllers have been undergone Wildlife Aware training and accreditation, introduced by CRRU in 2010. For 2011, there are currently four more courses planned, each with up to 15 places available.

The purpose is to combine maximum efficacy in rat control with minimum risk of rodenticide exposure to non-target species, in an integrated and recognised qualification, explains CRRU chairman Dr Alan Buckle. "It recognises that among the many pressures and responsibilities on farmers, minimal impact on the environment is a very important one," he says.

"Farming also needs to be acutely conscious that its rodent control practices and the future availability of modern rodenticides are under review in connection with the European Parliament's new Biocidal Products Regulation that is due to be finalised during 2011."

When the new regulation is in force, Dr Buckle suggests that it could have a significant impact on the availability and use of rodenticide products.

"If we want to avoid having unworkable restrictions imposed on us by the EU, we have to get a grip on the situation ourselves," he urges. "Farmers, game-keepers and rural pest controllers share a major responsibility to use rodenticides responsibly and effectively. If this does not happen, we could find ourselves heavily restricted in what we can do, possibly to the detriment of effective rodent control and production of high quality farm outputs."

In addition to Wildlife Aware accreditation, CRRU also established a Supporters Club in 2010 for pest control companies involved in rural work, which has attracted more than 200 members in its first year of operation. Farmers and estate managers interested in engaging the services of a professional rodent control contractor with specific rural expertise can find lists of Wildlife Aware technicians and CRRU Supporters Club members on the BASIS and CRRU websites respectively: (<http://www.basis-reg.co.uk/media/documents/Wildlife%20Aware%20-%20Register%20of%20Accredited%20Technicians.pdf> and <http://www.thinkwildlife.org.uk/supporters.php>).

CRRU is a non-profit organisation, established in 2005, with the purpose of promoting effective rural rodent control at the same time as protecting non-target wildlife. It has close links with organisations such as Natural England, the Health and Safety Executive, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and Huddersfield and Reading Universities. CRRU member companies are Rentokil Initial, PelGar International, Novartis Animal Health, Killgerm Chemicals, Bell Laboratories, BASF Pest Control and Syngenta.

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Additional background to rodent control in the UK

- Rat population: 10.5 million (Source: International Pest Control, Jul–Aug 2004, vol 46, p202–203, quoting Roger Quy of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL).
- Compelling reasons for controlling rodents:
 - To prevent:
 - Consumption of foodstuffs.
 - Contamination and fouling.
 - Physical damage to property, structures and installations.
 - Transmission of diseases to humans and animals.
 - Damage to wildlife and game birds.
 - To provide:
 - Compliance with requirements of audit schemes.

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