



No escape from dirty jobs if Oxford ambition to be realised

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For UK farmers to achieve this year's Oxford Farming Conference ambition of 'Rising To The Challenge' of helping feed a global population 50% bigger than today within 40 years, with minimal environmental impact, one of the dirty but essential jobs will be controlling the rural rat population.

Amid the political and business issues dominating proceedings, the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) took its roadshow to Oxford for first time.

The significance of controlling rats is illustrated by a CRRU survey of farmers and countryside managers at the Game Fair that found 74% saying that climate change would stimulate an increase in the rat population. Based on evidence they saw in their work, 61% said the rat population was already rising, while another 30% reckoned it was static.

This is corroborated by the most recently available report from the National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA) annual survey of local authority rodent control 2008. It found a 15% year-on-year increase in treatments for rat infestations, which clearly are a significant food safety risk.

Among the highly pathogenic zoonotic organisms carried by rats are salmonella, leptospira, toxoplasma, listeria, campylobacter and cryptosporidium. One rat produces about 40 faecal pellets and 15ml of urine each day, or 14,600 and five litres respectively per year.

According to CRRU chairman Dr Alan Buckle, it has been estimated that the UK rural rat population consumes in the order of 200 tonnes a day of food that would otherwise be destined for humans. One in every two farm fires, he adds, is believed to be started by rat damage causing electricity cables to short.

With protecting UK food production in mind, Dr Buckle says a particular concern is preventing or limiting the development of rats with resistance to second generation anticoagulant rodenticides. "In practice, this means limited and highly targeted use of these potent materials, which essentially is the ultimate example of responsible use," he says. "Otherwise, if widespread resistance were to develop, our ability to control rats would be severely compromised, with potentially serious effects on UK agricultural production."

As part of its outreach work promoting responsible and effective rodent control in rural locations, CRRU has recently launched a BASIS-accredited Wildlife Aware training course.

This is an abridged industry version of a set of five teaching modules developed by CRRU for students on gamekeeping and countryside management courses at members of the Land Based Colleges National Consortium (LBCNC).

On gaining accredited status, participants are entitled to display a licensed Wildlife Aware logo to signify their competence in combining effective control of pest rodents with minimising non-target animals' exposure to rodenticides.

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 the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, the Health and Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Directorate, Natural England, the Pesticides Forum and the universities of Huddersfield and Reading.

CRRU member companies are BASF Pest Control, Bell Laboratories, Killgerm Chemicals, Novartis Animal Health, PelGar International, Rentokil Initial and Syngenta.

To help farmers and other rural occupations control rats responsibly, CRRU promotes a seven-point code of good practice, available on its website www.thinkwildlife.org.uk.

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Electronic copies available on www.thinkwildlife.org.uk





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Additional background to rodent control in the UK

- 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)).
- The compelling reasons for controlling rodents are:
 - 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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