

# Wild pigs continue to be a nuisance

THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2016

Wild pigs continue to plague farmers and ranchers in much of Texas.

They are a year-round nuisance to producers, said Dr. Billy Higginbotham, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service wildlife specialist in Overton, but farrowing, the birth of new litters of pigs, typically peaks in the spring.

Higginbotham said farmers and ranchers in 253 of 254 Texas counties face a constant battle to prevent or reduce damages by wild pigs. He added that the statewide population estimate is around 2.6 million wild pigs, and limited ways of controlling their numbers means they are here to stay

“Given the population numbers, there’s no way to eradicate them but you can

reduce exposure to damage by managing their numbers,” Higginbotham said.

“It costs producers time and money to repair damages and deal with the wild pig population, he said, pointing 71 percent of landowners with pastureland who responded to an AgriLife Extension survey reported damages by wild pigs.

A conservative estimate of statewide damages based on a decade-old study puts the annual cost to farmers and ranchers at \$52 million. Producers spent an additional \$7 million each year to repair damages and deal with wild pig populations, according to the same estimate.

Wild pigs are omnivores and will seek any food source for calories. They cause much of the damages to crops when they dig, or root, for food sources, such as grub worms,

planted seed and plant roots.

Landowners should monitor for signs of wild pig activity, such as tracks, rubs against fence posts and trees, well-used trails and hair stuck on barbed-wire fences where they cross.

“If you see the signs of hogs, it’s best to take a proactive approach and try to reduce their numbers,” he said. “They may just be moving through your land but eventually they will cause problems. The more you reduce their numbers the more you reduce the damage they cause.”

Higginbotham said there are four legal ways to address wild hogs in Texas – trapping, snaring, shooting and catch dogs.

“Hiring professional shooters to reduce wild pig numbers from helicopters represents a cost-effective way for

farmers and ranchers in parts of the state with less tree canopy, but in East Texas trapping is advised,” he added. “Corral-type traps work best, especially when a landowner can catch an entire family or sounder of pigs.”

However, Higginbotham said it takes a process to trap effectively. “Pigs must be hooked on the bait before placement of the trap,” he added. “The trap should then be baited to allow the pigs to get comfortable. It could take a week, it could take several weeks depending on how much trapping pressure they’ve experienced.”