

## 080305 – Responsible Use of Rodenticides & Molluscicides

### SUMMARY

#### 1. Concern for Wildlife and the Environment

- Most rodenticide and molluscicide users, whilst caring for wildlife and the environment, do not perceive that use of these products has any major impact. In general, they believe that rodenticides and molluscicides are used safely and responsibly.
- The main issue limiting responsible use is that farmers and gamekeepers usually have limited knowledge; **they are not aware of what they do not know.**
- Key motivators influencing adoption for good practice regarding safe and responsible use are:
  1. Users' own concerns for pets, children, wildlife and the environment
  2. Compliance with farm assurance and accreditation schemes.
  3. Cost savings (Molluscicide users)

#### 2. Information and advice sought and ease of following advice

- Overall, most rodenticide and molluscicide users believe they have good knowledge and therefore do not recognise the need for additional advice and training. However, when users attend courses, many are surprised by the benefits gained.
- Nonetheless, several information gaps exist, although most users do not recognise this for themselves:

**RODENT CONTROL**  
 Speed of efficacy  
 Resistance management & product rotation  
 Where to find rats / placement sites  
 Frequency of baiting / replenishing  
 Legislative changes and new products

**SLUG CONTROL**  
 Ways of reducing treatments  
 Strengths and weaknesses of different products  
 Dose rates for different weather conditions

- Agronomists are the preferred source of advice regarding molluscicides.
- For rodent control, most obtain information from other users, from pack labels and from member organisations. Most prefer to obtain information passively, e.g. from magazines and brochures.
- Around a third to a half of arable farmers have attended training courses within the last 5 years regarding control of slugs or rodents. However, few gamekeepers, dairy, pig or poultry producers have attended training recently. Most gamekeepers believe their long term experience and base training is sufficient.
- Overall, almost all respondents believe it is easy to follow advice regarding use of rodenticides and molluscicides.

- Awareness of the CRRU code is low amongst farmers. However, all PCOs surveyed and half the gamekeepers were aware of and understood the key elements of the code.

### **3. Awareness and practical implementation of safe and responsible use of *rodenticides***

- The benefits of using bait boxes to ensure bait is not consumed by other animals are strongly understood and most rodenticide users are now using these, although tubes are still used by some as well as bait being placed directly into burrows.
- The correct placement of bait points is also recognised as important by most farmers, gamekeepers and PCOs. However, few farmers and gamekeepers are preparing accurate plans. PCOs believe that farmers and gamekeepers do not use enough bait points or check and replenish them often enough and several users admit that they find this difficult and would like more information to help them with this.
- Most respondents are aware of the need to store rodenticides safely.
- Most are also aware of the need to dispose of rodent bodies. However, in practice they find it is very difficult to locate these.
- Risk of rodent infestation is carried out mainly based on incidence determined by sight of droppings or damage. Test baiting or regular checking is not common practice.
- Frequency of using rodenticides is determined mainly by a combination of the level of infestation, past experience and the time of year.
- The majority of rodenticide users maintain records of product use, detailing the date of use, location of bait points and amount of bait used.
- Overall, users perceive that other rodenticide users use rodenticides safely.

### **4. Awareness and practical implementation of safe and responsible use of *molluscicides***

- Users of molluscicides are mainly focused on reducing volumes of molluscicides used to reduce risk to the environment and wildlife
- Most turn to their agronomist for advice and have limited awareness of use guidelines beyond the product label.
- Slug risk and frequency of application is usually assessed based on current incidence levels, the weather and past experience. Many farmers also carry out test baiting (3 out of 5).
- Overall, molluscicide users perceive that other molluscicide users are using molluscicides safely.

## 5. Control of other predators

- ✦ Control of crows, magpies and foxes is important, particularly by gamekeepers.
- ✦ There is less clarity amongst both farmers and gamekeepers regarding best practice and codes of practice concerning control of predators, with many not aware of where to access information. Most would not report sighting a dead bird of prey.
- ✦ The rules regarding predator control are considered to be more constraining than regarding use of rodenticides and molluscicides, possibly largely due to confusion in understanding what is best practice (many farmers and gamekeepers are unsure of legal and illegal forms of control).
- ✦ Gamekeepers report more public interference than do farmers. Main concerns are complaints regarding shooting rather than interference with traps and bait boxes.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

1. Most farmers and gamekeepers are personally motivated to ensure safety to the environment and wildlife as well as to other animals and the public. Accordingly, the basic principles of safe and responsible use are widely adopted by farmers and gamekeepers regarding use of both rodenticides and molluscicides. Practical guidelines will be readily accepted without the need for enforcement, although practices which comply with farm assurance will also aid adoption.
2. Whilst users of molluscicides take regular advice from agronomists and many have also recently attended training programmes, there is a stronger need to improve the quality of advice to users of rodenticides who rely mainly on their past experience and only occasionally take external advice or participate in training programmes. Relatively few currently use PCOs. Supplier communications, magazines and postal information are all likely to be effective in messaging.
3. There is no single clearly defined code of practice recognised as the main source for guidance for either rodenticides or molluscicides. There is a need to increase both awareness and understanding of the CRRU to improve consistency of messages through a single main source.
4. There is potential to improve farmer and gamekeeper knowledge through training schemes as well as through supplier and advisor advice.
5. Risk assessment for rodents is based mainly upon current incidence levels and past history. It is possible that control measures are either taken too late or unnecessarily. Few gamekeepers or farmers are carrying out test baiting. Practical guidance on risk assessment and definition of the benefits to avoid unnecessary rodenticide use is required and would be particularly appreciated if a cost saving is also achieved.
6. Most farmers and gamekeepers are confused regarding legal controls and practice for crows and magpies. Clear and practical advice for control of crows and magpies would be welcomed.