



## MARKET RESEARCH ON COUNTRYSIDE USERS AND ON RODENTICIDE AND SLUG PELLETS RESPONSIBLE USE: POLICY OPTIONS

### Introduction

This paper has been prepared as part of an action point from the **caip** stakeholders meeting of 7 May 2009.

The paper outlines;

- The key findings of market research on: awareness and use of best practice amongst farmers' gamekeepers and pest control operatives; and awareness of WIIS and legal pest control amongst countryside users.
- Positive findings and highlights potential areas at which **caip** should direct activity.

Chemicals Regulation Directorate

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## Points to Note from the Results of the Market Research on Rodenticide and Slug Pellet Responsible Use:

### EVIDENCE OF GOOD OR BEST PRACTICE

#### **Awareness of risk and risk mitigation**

- The survey shows that most users of rodenticides and slug pellets use these products safely and responsibly.
- The key factors driving user behaviour and the adoption of best practice are users' own concerns for pets, children, wildlife and the environment as well as compliance with farm assurance and accreditation schemes and cost savings.
- Rodenticide use
  - Pest Control Operators (PCOs) believe they play a role in ensuring safe and responsible use across the industry.
  - There is good awareness of factors that ensure the safe use of rodenticides.
  - Correct placement of bait points is recognised as important by the majority (80%) of users.
  - Almost half the respondents are aware of the need to collect and dispose of rodent bodies, highest amongst gamekeepers.
  - Inspecting the bait, choosing appropriate products and correct storage of rodenticides are also recognised by many respondents.
  - Most users comply with requirements to record rodenticide use.
  - Severity of infestation and past experience are the main factors considered when deciding the frequency of rodenticide baiting.
- Slug pellet use<sup>1</sup>
  - Many safe use factors were recognised by slug pellet users.
  - The risk of slugs is assessed both through incidence and by carrying out regular checks and counts.
  - Test baiting is commonly carried out by users of slug pellets.

#### **Sources of Advice**

- Gamekeepers are aware of a range of different guidelines
- Users of slug pellets take regular advice from agronomists

#### **Reporting/Notifying of irresponsible use**

- Gamekeepers tend to report more public interference than farmers do. Most incidents relate to shooting rather than tampering with traps and bait boxes.

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<sup>1</sup> The market research was conducted before the start of the Pelletwise campaign

## POTENTIAL AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF caip

### Awareness of risk and risk mitigation

- Assessment of rodent control needs is based mainly upon current incidence levels and past history. Often control measures are taken either too late or unnecessarily.

*This is being addressed in the current campaign through a combination of training and dissemination of advice (e.g. the Controlling Pests in the Countryside booklet provides guidance on prevention of infestations and best practice).*

*Work by CRRU (the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use) compliments this activity*

### Sources of Advice

- Respondents felt there was no single clearly defined code of practice recognised as the main source of guidance for either rodenticides or slug pellets.

*The market research was done before the launch of the Pelletwise campaign, but, the best practice booklet combined with the training should increase rodenticide knowledge. caip's links with CRRU should also increase rodenticide knowledge.*

- The main barrier to safe use in practice is limited knowledge. However, most users of rodenticides and slug pellets do not recognise the need for additional advice and training. When users participate in training activities many are surprised by the benefits gained.

*Active promotion of training, as well as registration for CPD points for it is likely to increase the knowledge of this area.*

- Rodenticides
  - Farmers and gamekeepers rely mainly on past experience rather than training thus there is a strong need to improve the availability and promotion of rodenticide advice for this audience. Key weaknesses relate to collection and disposal of bodies, recording use and assessing control needs.

*This should be addressed by caip training and the new best practice booklet, but does highlight the need to promote the training and the booklet both with users and employers. caip activity needs to be linked with CRRU work in this area. There is potential for the promotion of this advice and the associated training through the annual NRoSO (National Register of Sprayer Operators) training courses which reach 10-12,000 sprayer operators per annum*

- There is potential to improve farmer and gamekeeper knowledge of rodenticides through training schemes/FAQs. Training through CPD is available to PCOs.

*The 'safe and effective rodent control' section of the caip training features PowerPoint slides that go into greater details than those provided by the booklet*

- Less than a third of rodenticide users have participated in any training and of those who have, the training was mostly more than three years ago.

*This should be addressed by caip training, but does highlight the need to increase take-up of the training.*

- Slug Pellets

- Just over half the slug pellet users had participated in training within in the last six years.

*NROSO courses have featured slug pellet application in 2007 and 2008. To improve application standards further the NPTC in conjunction with the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group is developing new qualifications and associated training courses for those involved in the application of slug pellets. The intention is to ensure substantial numbers of users are trained within the next 6 months.*

- Predator Control

- Most farmers are confused regarding legal control practices for the management of crows and magpies.

*Pages 4 & 5 of the best practice booklet explain some of the requirements of legal predator control, as does a large section of the training, which features a practical display of a Larsen trap, as well as a number of relevant slides on the subject.*

- The rules regarding predator control are considered more constraining than those relating to the use of rodenticides and slug pellets.

*This is due to the welfare issues associated with trapping animals, the fact that it is not permissible to control some species. Operators need to be aware of the relevant legislation for their area of work. Clear advice in the training and the best practice booklet should help ensure that farmers are aware of what control techniques are permitted and how best to use them.*

### **Other areas**

- Need for publicity and clarity on legal control practices for the management of crows and magpies.
- More publicity needed on predator control.

Points to Note from the Results of the Market Research on Countryside Users:

EVIDENCE OF GOOD OR BEST PRACTICE

**Awareness of Risks**

- Most countryside users are aware of:
  - the legal approaches to control rats; and
  - the importance of using poisons responsibly to avoid non-target wildlife and wild animals being poisoned.
- Over half of countryside users state that they would be likely to report dead wildlife incidents if they suspected any illegal activities.

**Reporting Arrangements**

- Countryside users are more likely to report deaths of birds of prey, deer and badgers than they are of 'other wildlife'.
- Most countryside users would report a death to the RSPCA or the police.

## ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

### Awareness of illegal practices

- Countryside users have low awareness of the potential risk of wildlife poisoning and who to report cases to.

*A new countryside user leaflet explaining the role of WIIS should increase this awareness.*

- Just under a half of countryside users mentioned that finding animals in a trap or snare would alert them that the death of a wild animal is suspicious. (Although traps and snares if used correctly are legal). Despite regularly seeing dead animals, almost no countryside users take any action when they see a dead wild animal in the countryside.
- Less than 10% mentioned that evidence of baiting or poisoning would alert them to a suspicious death.

*The **caip** booklet and countryside users' leaflet, if targeted correctly, should raise the profile of this issue.*

- Many countryside users do not understand which control approaches for rodents, magpies, crows and foxes are legal or illegal.

*The relevant section of the booklet does mention snares and traps, although the best practice booklet is not designed for this audience, and therefore a new countryside users' leaflet is being prepared.*

### Reporting Arrangements

- Only one person mentioned the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS).

*All **caip** material needs to highlight or mention WIIS in greater detail. This needs to be more than just a reference to it within the text. We should also look to increase profile more generally (e.g. improving links with other related initiatives e.g. PAW).*

- Although countryside users see a large number of dead wildlife cases, awareness and recognition of possible poisoning incidents is low.

*The countryside users' leaflet should aim to increase this awareness and also explain legitimate control for rodents, magpies, crows and foxes.*

- A third of countryside users did not know whom they should report suspicious animal deaths to.

*Although the campaign aims to promote best practice, it also needs to publicise WIIS and condemn bad practice. Clarity and consistency is needed on incident reporting. Other than WIIS, the Police are the official organisation for reporting of suspicious incidents. However both RSPCA and RSPB can play a valuable role in this exercise along with other **caip** partners.*