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## OILSEEDS NEWS - MEDIA RELEASES

### MONITOR FOR MICE NOW



Grain growers are urged to monitor mouse activity in their paddocks as numbers have built in many grain growing districts. PHOTO: Courtesy CSIRO.

Mouse numbers appear to be on the rise and growers are urged to monitor their activity to determine if baiting of paddocks is warranted.

Linton Staples, director of zinc phosphide bait manufacturing company Animal Control Technologies, said mouse activity was a ‘big issue’ this season with reports of high mouse numbers in parts of South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria.

own paddocks when mice threaten crops,” he said.

He said mouse populations will vary considerably from site to site and are unstable at present. Mice can breed rapidly in summer, but populations may crash once their food runs out, so until now, it has been too early for most growers to bait.

“Decision time is rapidly approaching,” said Dr Staples. “A crop can rapidly suffer damage from residual mouse population at planting time.”

“Growers need to be vigilant. There is no method of mouse management more valuable than farmers individually monitoring their

All newly-sown crop types are at risk, although damage from mice generally causes bigger financial losses during the podding stage for canola crops.

He said the cost of baiting with a ground-spreader is about \$9 a hectare, a fraction of the cost of re-sowing; and zinc phosphide carries no environmental risk.

Dr Staples said monitoring can also justify not spending the money on bait, and cited an example of a grower who saved thousands of dollars by first determining that the threatening holes were inactive prior to applying the bait.

He said 'hotspots' are present in South Australia in the western Eyre Peninsula from Kimba to Penong and down to Streaky Bay. Central EP was 'quiet', he said.

"We are also having increasing reports in SA in the Upper Yorke Peninsula, north from Maitland, including Kadina and as far north as Crystal Brook. We are also keep a watching brief in the Mallee and southeast SA," he said.

According to Dr Staples, crops in the Geraldton and Northampton areas of Western Australia are potential at more risk than last year when \$100M of crops were saved.

CSIRO research scientist Peter Brown said mice have not been a major problem in crops in Australia for over ten years due to drought, and efforts to keep an eye on numbers have dropped away.

"Monitoring has gone off the radar because of the drought, so we really don't know how widespread the mouse activity is, or the numbers of mice," he said.

"We normally get a peak in mouse activity at this time of year. Growers need to monitor each paddock to make an informed decision on whether it is worthwhile baiting. Sometimes mouse damage occurs in small pockets in a paddock and the grower may decide to re-sow that area," Dr Brown said.

One of the most effective and easy method of monitoring is to walk a 100 metre strip in a paddock and cover over mouse burrows with loose soil, straw or paper. If the covering is disturbed the next day, it indicates fresh mouse activity. Talcum powder poured around burrows can also indicate mouse activity where tracks become evident the following day.

Monitoring cards, which are squares of paper soaked in canola oil and pegged into the ground, can also be used to indicate mouse activity.,

Bait stations, snap-back traps along fencelines and in paddocks and simple observations also give clues about mouse activity.

Dr Brown said research has shown sowing some pulses and cereals slightly deeper can help reduce mouse damage by making it more difficult for mice to find newly-sown seed.

Vertebrate Pest Control researcher, Glen Saunders, of NSW Industry and Investment, said the rise in mouse numbers is no surprise.

“It has been over 10 years since the last mouse plague in south-eastern Australia. We’ve been expecting this, but it’s come at a time when growers can least afford it,” Dr Saunders said. “While no damage reports have been received from NSW as yet, the situation further south suggests growers need to be monitoring their crops.”

The NSW Department of Industry and Investment has excellent information on mouse monitoring for grain growers in the Agfact “mouse monitoring and baiting”, available on its website.

Animal Control Technologies also have a free 32-page booklet and DVD on managing mice in crops, produced with support from the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

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