



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/agriculture-predator-control>

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Predator problems? A control guide for livestock producers

K-State wildlife specialist outlines non-lethal ways to protect livestock from predators

By Jacob Klaudt, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Based on 2020 market values, predators cause approximately \$4 million in losses annually to Kansas cattle producers. Likewise, they financially burden the state's small ruminant operations to the tune of about \$750,000 per year.

To mitigate the economic impact and other effects of predation, Kansas State University wildlife specialist Drew Ricketts said producers have various non-lethal control methods available to keep livestock safe.

"The number of coyotes around or removed doesn't tend to be directly associated with how many losses a producer has," he said. "So, if you're not having problems with predators, then hunting or trapping shouldn't be a chore for you, and trying to lower coyote populations to prevent future predation isn't an efficient thing to do."

Dead livestock commonly attracts predators. Thus, Ricketts recommends proper disposal of carcasses away from calving, lambing or kidding areas to lower the risk of a predator attack, noting that young livestock become especially vulnerable.

"All wild predators in Kansas are mainly scavenging when feeding on large food items like livestock," he said. "If we have dead livestock near those areas, then we are exposing ourselves to more predation by attracting predators to a food source, so composting and hauling off dead animals are crucial and often overlooked."

Coyotes are the main predators of livestock in Kansas. Yet, Ricketts said domestic dogs account for a sizeable portion of predation incidents as well. To keep both kinds at bay, producers can strategically fence locations to keep dogs and coyotes away from livestock.

"I suggest woven wire fences with 4-inch by 4-inch squares," Ricketts said. "If you've got 12-inch-wide openings six inches tall, coyotes can squeeze right through those fences. Also, there are some excellent designs for electrified fencing."

He added: “However, coyotes and other predators can climb over a fence, so if you're trying to achieve 100% exclusion, we want to have a hot wire on top or have a tall enough fence.”

According to Ricketts, predators may also try to expose a fence’s weakness by digging under it, which actually presents an opportunity to catch them.

“Digging under is likely going to happen, but we can use those crawl-under spots to apprehend them before they cause damage,” he said. “So, don't plug those holes, call me or your local extension office, and I'll come out and show you how to target and trap those coyotes causing problems.”

Beyond carcass disposal and fencing, producers may choose to practice night penning or securing their livestock in a barn or other structure during night hours.

“Coyotes usually hunt right around sunrise, sunset and through the nighttime,” Ricketts said. “Accordingly, this is one of the most effective ways to exclude predation – especially for small ruminant producers.”

Guardian animals can also keep livestock out of harm’s way. Ricketts said the kind of guardian “depends on the best fit for your operation.” Species often used as guardians include:

- Llamas.
- Donkeys.
- Dogs.

Due to their status as a migratory bird, non-lethal control strategies remain the most common option for black vultures, which can be seen in the far southeast corner of the state.

“You’re going to have to haze them,” Ricketts said. “Deterring them includes a combination of using pyrotechnics, noise-making devices and hanging fake, dead vultures – called effigies – near roosting sites to exclude those birds.”

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Sidebar

Lethal predator management and safety

While non-lethal predator management can be an efficient use of time and resources for producers, some scenarios call for lethal predator control, said Kansas State University wildlife specialist Drew Ricketts, noting that hunting and trapping make up the two main strategies.

“We can shoot coyotes when we're out checking livestock, but by and large most coyote problems that require lethal control are taken care of by trapping and snaring,” he said. “Both methods are a lost art, so I teach producers how to do both effectively.”

Ricketts offers this service as part of his extension program and provides proper equipment to producers looking to trap or snare problem animals. Concerned livestock owners can find contact information for Ricketts online at [K-State Extension Wildlife Management](#).

“The thing to remember is those traps and snares are out there working 100% of the time, so you have to check them once a day,” he said. “Any sort of shooting or calling of predators requires you to be present, so we can also make better use of time with the traps and snares.”

Hunting predators using calls proves to be a safe and selective method of removing wildlife that cause issues.

“You’re seeing the animal when it is alive and making a decision about whether to dispatch it or not,” Ricketts said. “You also have the opportunity to see what’s behind the animal and follow all the appropriate steps for firearm safety to make sure you’re not going to shoot an unintended animal or other resource by accident.”

When a suspected predation occurs, Ricketts said producers should observe all aspects of the scene first, then look for lethal wounds and document the carcass with pictures.

If possible, Ricketts encourages taking pictures prior to moving a carcass, and ensuring they show the posture of the animal, any blood on soil or vegetation and the general scene where the event occurred. Any potential predator attack can be reported to Ricketts at 785-532-1949 or arickett@ksu.edu.

“Oftentimes, we see an animal that’s been chewed into through the abdomen or rectum, and this can be a sign of predation or scavenging, so it is important to look around the head and neck for lethal wounds,” he said. “Take pictures of any scat, or tracks and note if the animal has been covered up before you move it because all of those factors are important when I investigate what happened.”

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas State University Extension Wildlife Management, <https://www.wildlife.k-state.edu/>

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