

## Nuisance Birds: New and Established Control Methods

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Now is the time to think about control of pest birds on the farm, especially starlings. These birds are most often a problem in winter and spring. Starlings have been cited as the number one nuisance bird in Pennsylvania. Other pest birds in Pennsylvania include pigeons, house sparrows, Canada geese, and black birds. There are many problems associated with birds on the farm, including spread of disease, unsanitary conditions, feed loss and annoyance to animals and humans alike. Control measures require careful consideration and persistence to be effective.

### The Problem:

Birds can have a negative impact on the profitability of a dairy farm. One concern is the potential for disease transmission. Since birds can travel easily from farm to farm, they pose a threat to farm biosecurity. But, according to a recent study, birds can carry diseases such as Salmonella, but they are not considered important reservoirs of Salmonella organisms on the dairy farm. Of much greater concern is the amount of protein birds can consume from livestock feed. It is estimated that in a week, 200 starlings can eat 175 pounds of grain and contaminate that much or more with their droppings, and by throwing feed out of the bunk. It's easy to see how birds can factor into milk production losses. It is estimated that overall bird populations cause an annual loss of \$100 million to U.S. agriculture.

### Control Methods:

The ideal scenario is to stop the bird problem before it becomes a major issue. Keys to success include: start early before birds form a strong attraction to the site; be persistent until the problem is solved; and use a combination of strategies. Control measures include trapping, bird-proofing, cultural methods and habitat modification, frightening, repellants, shooting, and toxicants. Starlings, pigeons, and sparrows are not protected by federal or state laws.

*Control methods can include any combination of the following:*

**Live trapping** - Use live birds as a decoy to catch 100 or more starlings a day, which then can be euthanized. Non-target species of birds should be freed.

**Exclusion and bird-proofing** - Cover all openings such as eaves and ridges with bird-proof netting or plastic strips. Potential perch sites should be modified or protected.

**Cultural Methods/Habitat Modification** - Limit access to water by making sure water levels in waterers are low enough so birds cannot perch on the edge to drink.

**Shooting** - Can be a very effective population control for smaller numbers of birds. Best used as a dispersal technique, rather than population control, for larger bird numbers. Safety is a concern. Notify authorities and neighbors if necessary.

**American Kestrels** - These birds of prey eat rodents and small birds, providing a natural biological control method. For more information on how to attract a nesting pair, visit: [www.raptor.cvm.umn.edu/content.asp?page=2501](http://www.raptor.cvm.umn.edu/content.asp?page=2501)

**Avicides—Avitrol, Starlicide Complete, and DRC-1339** are toxicants currently approved for use in Pennsylvania. More

specific information about each follows. A prebait process should be used for all avicides, and to gain any measure of success, the process should be done in cold weather, below freezing, when the ground is covered with snow—limiting access to other feed sources. For several days the untreated pre-bait is placed in a carefully selected place, safe from consumption by other animals. After acceptance of the pre-bait is established, and NO non-target birds are present, the toxicant is added. Depending on the toxicant used, treated birds will usually die within 24-36 hours. Dead birds can be disposed of in the trash, manure pit, buried, or incinerated—as long as it complies with local regulations. Check with your State Department of Agriculture for regulatory information. Be prepared to give the exact product name and the EPA Registration Number.

**Avitrol** - Avitrol is a **restricted use pesticide** used as a frightening agent for starlings, black birds, grackles and cowbirds. Only a small portion of the bait is treated, and only a few birds will die. The intent of this product is not to kill a large number of birds, but to act as a frightening agent. The affected birds act in an erratic manner, and emit distress calls which frighten other birds from the area.

**Starlicide Complete**— In January 2002, Starlicide Complete was put back on the market in PA. This product is registered for the control of starlings and blackbirds around livestock and poultry operations. The toxicant (0.1% 3-chloro p-toluidine hydrochloride) is pre-packaged with bait. Fresh product must be used for it to be effective. Poisoned birds will usually die within 24-36 hours, often at their roosting site which is potentially not on the farm. Although the dead birds are not dangerous to predators, they should be disposed of to prevent spread of diseases they may carry, and for good sanitation.

**Starlicide Complete is a restricted use pesticide.**

**DRC-1339** - USDA/ Wildlife Services in PA is gearing up for a new starling control program. This new program utilizes a bait treated with toxicant DRC-1339 (the same toxicant found in Starlicide Complete), and will usually kill birds within 24 hours. This procedure was field tested and found to be quite successful in Michigan and Wisconsin last winter. The toxicant destroys the bird's kidney function, and is quickly metabolized, thus eliminating any possible secondary poisoning. This toxicant is presented in its technical form, and can be mixed with different baits, at different strengths than Starlicide Complete. **The toxicant is registered for USDA use only.** USDA Wildlife Services is a Federal agency that requires reimbursement for program costs. Cost will vary according to mileage, time, materials, and the number of birds present on the farm. It is possible for neighboring farmers to request service at the same time, thus cutting down on mileage and time expenses. This program may need to be repeated in future years because it DOES NOT kill 100% of the birds.

### Resources:

Contact information for farmers interested in more information about pest bird control, or the DRC-1339 toxicant, should visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/ws](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws) Click on "Wildlife Services by State." or call (301) 734-7921.

