

Evaluating & Implementing Practices to Control the Piute Ground Squirrel Epidemic in Southern Utah

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The Piute Ground Squirrel, (*Urocitellus mollis*, previously known as a subspecies of Townsends ground squirrel) populations on agricultural lands are increasing in southwest Utah. It is a small gray squirrel found mostly in the Great Basin. It eats alfalfa, grasses and other agronomic crops. The reduction in alfalfa and other crop yields and the cost of controlling Piute ground squirrels to farmers in western Utah exceeds hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Squirrels have increased in infested areas and are showing up in places not previously found. Previous control programs such as shooting, flooding, treating with zinc phosphide and gopher bait have not been effective. Utah State University Extension has conducted trials to determine which baits are most accepted and when is the best time to apply the bait. This information has been taught to the farmers in workshops held in January of each year. The research has shown that Piute ground squirrels are not attracted to whole grain baits. They prefer a small pelleted bait. Because of the research conducted the State of Utah has issued a Section 24(c) Special Local Need Label for the Rozol Vole Bait (0.05%Diphacinone) for the control of the Piute ground squirrel. This label allows for bait station baiting and spot baiting. The research has shown up to 75% control when applied before the alfalfa greens up in the spring. This education program has helped many farmers save money by reducing the number of squirrels that are eating their crops. In this project we have strived to educate all the farmers in the area on the importance of controlling the ground squirrel and have given them a program to help them accomplish this.

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