

COMPARISON OF METHODS OF CONTROLLING POCKET GOPHERS

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ABSTRACT

Valley pocket gophers are a common agricultural pest in many areas of the western United States. Pocket gophers predominantly eat roots, although they will pull vegetation into their burrows, and eat plants immediately adjacent to their burrow holes. They are called pocket gophers because they have external fur-lined pouches that they use to carry food. Pocket gophers are best identified by their cheek pouches and the soil mounds they leave behind as evidence of their tunneling or burrowing activities. Unlike other fossorial rodents (rodents that live under the ground), pocket gophers are active year-round. Because of this they do more damage than many of the other rodents. They cost farmers hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in control cost and damage to haying equipment and loss of crops. A variety of methods are available to manage these populations but there are many questions about which method works best. Utah State University Extension has compared methods of controlling pocket gophers and conducted research plots in ten different counties throughout the state. These methods include trapping, applying bait into the burrows, and using different kinds of fumigants. Some farmers in Utah have purchased the Gopher General. It is a machine that is pulled behind a tractor and meters a slow-release fumigant product into an artificial tunnel. The fumigant gas released stays below ground, spreads throughout the tunnel and moves through the soil. All the control methods tested showed some control, but more research is needed to determine the best method. The research shows that farmers trying to control pocket gophers should pick the control method or methods that works best for them and their operation and continue it throughout the season and coming years.

Key Words: Pocket Gophers, Pest Control, Rodent Control

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