

Grains Research Development Corporation highlight mice plague concern

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Higher rainfalls resulting in bumper crops recorded in SA followed by mild summer conditions have the potential to ignite ideal breeding grounds for mice, a national research body warns.

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The Grain Research Development Corporation (GRDC) concern was recently highlighted following a national webinar centred on the effects of mice this season.

According to a GRDC report, 'mice have ravaged freshly planted summer crops in parts of northern NSW and QLD and in large numbers elsewhere across eastern and southern states'.

Of increasing worry was the further impact to summer crops ahead of grain fill and harvest, and the potential threat to the 2021 winter grain crop.

Yet Bordertown agronomist and owner of D & M Rural Pty Ltd Glen Mead says, so far, there is no threat of increasing mice numbers in his patch of the South East.

His findings, he assures, comes from looking for evidence of mice damage in paddocks which would warrant treatment of baiting.

"At this point in time we have no evidence to suggest high mice numbers," said the agronomist of 25 years.

"We are seeing the odd (mouse) hole in the paddock, but I guess we have been through mouse plagues before to know."

"For us they are a one in 10-year event."

Notably, the last mouse plague for the region hit in 2016.

"It wasn't a major plague; we certainly saw a reasonable amount of activity," he said.

The increased presence of rodents led his business to be cleared out of baits, with people reporting mice in their homes, sheds and haystacks.

Furthermore, in the last two years, Mr Mead observed about three paddocks needing bait for mice, yet nothing further.

"We are not seeing a lot of activity in paddocks which suggests mice are going to be a problem.

Yet understood the situation could change in a month's time.

"I still have bait here from 2016 which I haven't sold, haven't moved...," he added.

Meanwhile, CSIRO research officer Steve Henry, who led the webinar discussion, shared how in some interstate cases, large mice populations had led to a total loss of crops.

"That's pretty nasty stuff," he told *Australian Community Media*.

Unfortunately, he said, it means South Australia is not immune to the small rodent's impacts.

The latest mouse concern extends to SA due to higher than normal soil saturation, a milder summer and more ground cover being recorded, which Mr Henry said creates ideal conditions for breeding.

In response, GDRC is committed to raising awareness to prepare farmers to prevent crop devastation by hosting a suite of information sessions on the subject.

Impressively, Friday morning's national webinar resulted in more than 350 stakeholders calling in and remaining online for over an hour to learn from a range of topics such as critical control considerations.

In a bid to reduce the risk, GDRC encouraged farmers with sheep to have them graze on the stubble or use spray at germination.

"If you think you are going to need to bait at sowing time make sure you have been talking to your bait suppliers early to ensure there are supplies on hand so you don't run short in an outbreak."

He further advised farmers to wait until six weeks before sowing crops to do the first rodent baiting.

"This gives the mouse the best possible chance of discovering the bait," he said.

In addition, Mr Henry said mice are always in the system.

"There are low numbers that are almost undetectable and when conditions get favourable they tend to breed up more and more."

"The only thing that makes mice move is running out of food. Moving is a dangerous thing," he added.

For more details, and for the full report on Friday's webinar available soon, visit www.grdc.com.au.