

Today is _____, _____ the _____. This is Ken Morgan's Northcoast Ag Report, our lead story is about _____ when we return

- [Perdue On Steel Tariffs, Flexibilities, And Trade](#)

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The Agriculture Secretary appreciates flexibilities given to some U.S. trading partners within recently announced tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. (Rod Bain and Secretary Sonny Perdue)

TAX REFORM UPDATE

Audio provided as a service to farm broadcasters by the American Angus Association

Audio with Kristine Tidgren, Attorney at the Iowa State University Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation

Much of the agriculture community applauded the G-O-P tax plan when it was signed into law at the end of 2017. But there are still lots of questions and uncertainty about tax reform provisions. And farmers and ranchers are asking how it will impact their particular operation.

Kristine Tidgren, Attorney at the Iowa State University Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation, emphasized that the way in which you set up your business operation could greatly influence how the tax reform affects you...tape

Cut #2 :25

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EDITORS: Photos of roof rats and their burrows can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/2p2Bukd>.

Roof rats unnerve farm workers, damage orchard crops

Monitor for rodent activity and use bait stations before the growing season to prevent problems, UC ANR scientists recommend.

Roof rats are running rampant in California orchards this year, according to UC Agriculture and Natural Resources scientists.

"In pistachio and other nut orchards, roof rats are burrowing and nesting in the ground where they're chewing on irrigation lines, causing extensive damage," said Rachael Long, UC Cooperative Extension advisor. "They are also nesting in citrus trees, feeding on the fruit and terrifying field workers when they jump out as people are picking fruit. The chewing pests are also girdling citrus limbs, causing branch dieback."

The wet winter of 2017 led to lots of weed seeds for rats to eat. "Last season, rats were also nibbling on pomegranates, avocados, and other fruit and nut crops, rendering them unmarketable," Long said.

Holes in the ground around the base of pistachio trees throughout a Yolo County orchard puzzled the grower.

"We looked for ground squirrels, but never saw any," Long said. "We set up game cameras, but only got birds and rabbits. We put rodent bait in the holes, but the digging didn't stop."

Long, the pest detective, cracked the case by consulting Niamh Quinn, UC Cooperative Extension human-wildlife interactions advisor based in Irvine. "She informed us that the damage we were seeing was from roof rats."

Burrowing roof rats sounds like an oxymoron. While roof rats generally don't burrow in urban environments, their country cousins have been known to burrow.

"It's not true that they don't burrow," Quinn said. "When I worked as staff research associate for Roger Baldwin, UC Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist, that is mostly what we studied, burrowing roof rats in orchards."

Control measures

Baldwin said, "It seems to be a good year for rats in a number of different areas and crops throughout the state. I've received more questions and comments about rats this year than perhaps the last 10 years combined. As for bait application, putting bait down burrow systems for rats doesn't usually work too well, so I'm not surprised that approach didn't work. Growers will likely have better luck with bait stations in the trees."

Because the rats climb, Baldwin suggests attaching bait stations to tree branches.

"In addition, elevating the bait stations will eliminate access to bait for many protected mammal species, such as kangaroo rats," Long said. "The bait diphacinone grain can be purchased from some ag commissioners' offices. This is what Roger Baldwin said they tested and it worked."

As for the bait stations, they should be designed so that there isn't any spillage for nontarget animals to eat, Long said.

When roof rat outbreaks occur, rodenticides are often needed to prevent crop damage. However, timing is critical as diphacinone use is highly restrictive and not allowed during the growing season, which is beginning as the weather warms.

"Check the product label for application instructions," Long reminds growers. "It's the law."

Identifying the pest

One way for growers to identify whether they have roof rats is by the size of the burrows. The nocturnal pests are active above ground in trees and below ground.

"Roof rats can forage away from their nest so you won't likely find signs of their activity, such as rat droppings outside their burrow, to help identify them," Long said.

Ground squirrels are active during the day, so they are more likely to be seen, dig holes about 4 inches in diameter and forage above ground near their burrows. Vole and mouse holes are 1- to 2-inches in diameter. Roof rat holes are typically 3 to 4 inches in diameter and might have nut shells in front of them, for example pistachio or almond shells. Rabbits will feed on seedling crops, but do not dig burrows.

Roof rats are prolific breeders that reproduce year-round, according to Baldwin. Females typically have three to five litters per year with five to eight young, enabling their populations to rapidly increase. The omnivores feed on a wide variety of plant and animal materials, allowing them to adapt to any environment, including urban and agricultural lands.

"Rats are sneaky and hard to spot," Long said. "If you see damage, including digging in the soil but no wildlife, suspect rats."

For more information on controlling roof rats, download Quinn and Baldwin's free UC ANR publication 8513, *Managing Roof Rats and Deer Mice in Nut and Fruit Orchards* at <http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/Details.aspx?itemNo=8513>.

For more information about ground squirrels, download the free UC IPM Pest Note <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7438.html>.