



# Chumming for HOGS

Use your trail-cameras and strategic chumming to effectively shut the door on **feral hog invaders**.

by **Dr. Billy Higginbotham**

TES RANDLE JOLLY

**At least 40 states** are now home to feral hog populations, and that is bad news for deer enthusiasts. As I said in my presentation at the recent Southeast Deer Study Group meeting in Oklahoma City, “If you are actively managing for white-tailed deer, your tolerance for feral hogs needs to be very, very low.”

Hogs are impacting our deer populations in three ways:

- 1) competition for native mast, such as acorns, wild grapes and persimmons.
- 2) competition for supplemental feeds, like shelled corn and pelleted

rations, in those states where deer supplementation is legal, and;

- 3) temporary displacement of deer given that, behaviorally, deer do not want to be anywhere near feral hogs.

While I don't believe feral hogs are major predators on fawns, I also realize that their opportunistic feeding behavior means they would not pass up an easy meal, either.

When I started trapping feral hogs in the early 1980s, they were a bit of a novelty in most of Texas. Since then, changes in trapping techniques have become neces-

sary due to altered hog behavior, including an increasing nocturnal tendency. With an explosion of hog populations across Texas over the past two decades, the failure of many landowners to adopt “best management practices” when trapping has given many hogs a Ph.D. education, leading to trap shyness in many areas.

What led to this explosion? Pigs truly cannot fly, but they trailer extremely well. Indiscriminate (and illegal) stockings across my state gave them a tremendous head start. Feral hogs have also benefitted from the huge increase in deer supplement-



tation that has occurred over the past 30 years on the 83 million acres of deer habitat the two species now share in Texas. Couple these events with a species that is the most prolific large mammal on the face of the Earth and you have a recipe for exactly what has happened in the Lone Star State and much of the Southeast.

If you live in one of those states where hogs have yet to experience negative encounters with humans, and where little or no trapping has been done, you can still get away with a lot. However, try those same sloppy techniques with hogs that have been hunted, dogged or – heaven forbid – trapped and re-released, and you are dealing with a completely different species. Even controlling human scent at trapping sites has become a necessity in many locations.

It is important to begin the process of trapping as soon as hog sign is noted, damage is discovered, or hogs are sighted on a property. Remember, females become sexually mature at about 8 months of age and therefore can have their first litter shortly after their first birthday. Delays in control efforts will only lead to more hogs which means more problems.

### Chumming 101

How can landowners stack the odds in their favor when dealing with this super intelligent animal? There are a number of different techniques that lead to trapping success, but one of the most important is pre-baiting – or what I like to call chumming for feral hogs.

Remember this if nothing else: you cannot trap what you cannot bait! *Job one* is to get those pesky porcines hooked on bait long before trapping is attempted. After all, trapping feral hogs is a process, not an event.

Feral hogs must be patterned much like white-tailed deer. If open pastures or crop fields are the sites of initial damage, do not start chumming right where that damage occurred. Rather, backtrack the marauding hogs to their daytime cover and begin chumming with bait at an adjacent location that is trap-friendly. Try to set up upwind if possible so the prevailing breeze can carry the bait's scent to the hogs.

The site-selection criteria should also include access by a vehicle and trailer if hogs are to be loaded out and moved from the capture site for slaughter or sale to a processor. While not an option in many states, Texas landowners can at least recover part of their trapping expenses by marketing their live hogs to an approved

### HOG TRAP SHOPPING LIST

- ✓ Six Livestock Panels: 5x16 feet x 4-inch square mesh @ \$45 each .....\$270
- ✓ 28 T-posts to support the trap panels, 6½ feet @ \$3.75 .....\$105
- ✓ Five T-posts to support the trip wire, 5 feet @ \$3.25 ..... \$16.25
- ✓ One trap gate\* .....\$300
- ✓ Baling wire.....\$8.75
- Total cost .....\$700**

\*Since hogs seldom respond to multiple bait sites at the same time, trap costs can be further reduced by sharing one gate among multiple traps.

holding facility or “buying station,” from which the hogs are shipped to a processing facility. Between 2004 and 2009, Texans sold 461,000 hogs via buying stations, with the cuts destined for white-tablecloth restaurants and export to Europe and Asia.

If you don't know where to start pre-baiting on your property, pre-bait several areas, and if the bait is being removed at one site, hang a trail-camera to confirm the presence of hogs and proceed from there. By keeping several sites continually baited (especially if you know multiple

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Inset: A trail-camera has confirmed use of bait by hogs (in this case, peaches from a nearby orchard). Below: A trap site has been selected. An open trap has been constructed, and bait continues to be refreshed outside and inside the trap, allowing all of the hogs to become habituated to feeding inside the trap.





Once hogs become comfortable eating chum inside the fence, the gate is added (but wired open). Hogs are now allowed to get comfortable with the gate. In this example, trail-cameras showed the hogs were comfortable feeding – and even napping! – inside the fence. This was the signal to arm the trap.



groups, or “sounders,” are present), you can take the fight to the hogs rather than waiting them out at a pre-determined location.

What bait should you choose for pre-baiting? Shelled corn is the gold standard, but every critter out there has an appetite for corn. Many trappers start the chumming process with shelled corn. However, if the bulk of this bait is being consumed by non-targets such as deer, crows or raccoons, switch to fermented bait. In addition, a recent trapping study conducted by Texas A&M University doctoral student Aaron Sumrall confirmed that using commercially available raccoon repellents significantly reduced raccoon consumption of bait without discouraging feral hogs.

Recent research in Texas has shown that in areas of rice production, fermented rice was more productive than other grain such as milo (sorghum) or corn. In areas where these other crops dominate production, fermented corn and milo are best.

Ferment grains in a metal trash can filled with water, and add sugar and yeast. Set the trash can out in the sun for several

weeks, stirring occasionally. *Caution:* Don't spill any of this concoction on your clothes on the way to bait the trap! I like to pour the concoction on the ground but also suspend it from a tree in a 3-foot PVC cylinder 6 inches in diameter. I drill the pipe full of holes and cap it on each end so the fragrant aroma can drift downwind to the hog's daytime haunts.

Be creative when it comes to baits. Dog food, overripe fruit, cheese-based catfish baits and the aforementioned fermented grains are just a few examples – the smellier the better. What about those strawberry flavorings provided from gelatin mix and soda pop? Research has backed up the feral hog's fondness for all things strawberry when mixed with other baits! Don't be afraid to experiment. In fact, use different baits at each location to help narrow down the hog's bait of choice, which can change from season to season.

In some cases, the chum site is pre-determined, as with an existing deer feeder location, but always check state game agency regulations to make sure baiting/chumming is allowed.

### Trail-Camera Monitoring

Along with the initial chumming step, setting up a trail-camera over the bait eases the task at hand. Although you can make on-site observations of bait consumption and check for other signs such as tracks, using a trail-camera to monitor hog response to chum can greatly increase your trapping effectiveness.

The question that always comes up with trail-cameras is whether models with infrared LEDs are necessary to avoid spooking the hogs with a flash. In my experience, the flash is not a deterrent on the larger traps that I employ, but if you disagree, stick with an IR model.

In addition to confirming hog response to chumming efforts, the trail-camera will also reveal the approximate number of hogs in the sounder. That speaks volumes as to the size of trap that will be needed to do the job. Also, most trail-cameras record both the dates and the times of events, so it is helpful to know just when those visits occur.

Once hogs are responding to chum,

*Continued.*

and after you build a trap, you will then position the trail-camera inside the trap to monitor activity as the hogs become accustomed to entering and feeding inside.

### Trap Design and Construction

Once the hogs are consistently responding to the bait, you can then assemble or position your trap of the appropriate size in that area. Continue chumming as it may take another week for the hogs to become accustomed to the trap itself.

Corral traps are a must if the sounders of hogs are large, say 12 hogs or more. I will seldom construct a trap that contains less than five or six 16-foot long livestock panels that are 5 feet tall (4 feet is *not* tall enough) with 4x4-inch mesh.

Panels are overlapped one mesh width and secured using 6½-foot T-posts spaced every 4 to 5 feet apart around the outside of the trap. The panels should be secured with wire at the bottom, middle and top of each post. No gaps should be left between the panels and the ground. I reinforce the gate by doubling up the T-posts on each side and space the T-posts slightly closer

together in the throat of the trap near the gate.

I then place a series of five or so 5-foot-long T-posts down the center of the trap's interior to support the gate tripwire. I wrap baling wire near the top (well above "hog height") of the first three T-posts, forming a loop to thread the tripwire through. On the next to the last T-post, I place the trip wire loop about halfway down the T-post and then make the loop on the last T-post (about 10 feet from the back of the trap) about 12 to 15 inches off the ground and then tie the tripwire to the back of the trap. That last 10 feet of tripwire running above the ground is where the hogs will trip the gate trigger.

I favor a "tear drop" shaped trap design because we always load out the hogs in a trailer once captured. You will be amazed how easily the hogs trailer when the trap is designed correctly. However, if you are not going to load out your hogs or prefer a trap that has 90° corners (square or rectangular shape) be sure and cover those corners. Feral hogs use trap corners just like you and I use a step ladder.

Let your trail-camera data dictate the

trap size – however, bigger is usually better, and traps employing eight to 10 livestock panels are not uncommon if trail-camera data reveals 30 or more hogs in a sounder. In those cases, I want to maximize the distance from the gate opening to the trigger mechanism so as many of the porkers as possible are inside before the first one trips the trigger that closes the gate. That is best accomplished by using a larger trap.

If you catch two hogs and six are still standing around outside the trap when you arrive to check it, your trap was too small! Of course the two downsides of using large corral traps are that you give up some degree of portability and the material costs may be higher.

To encourage the hogs to enter the newly erected trap, I will splay the gate end wide open to 10 feet or more (as in the photo on page 23). At this stage, I am not interested in forcing them through a narrow gate opening. I do not even attach the gate to the trap yet.

It is still much too soon to think about the actual act of trapping. In addition to the week often needed for the hogs to simply become accustomed to the trap's presence, another week or more may elapse before the hogs actually enter the trap itself.

Chum should always be poured from outside in a trail leading to the inside and on toward the back of the trap where the gate trigger will be located. Chum use inside the trap should be monitored by the trail-camera, which I now mount on the inside of the trap facing toward the gate.

Once the first hogs begin to enter the



**Left:** The trap is armed and ready, with the trip wire (visible in the photo) running down the middle to where it is anchored at the back of the trap.

**Below:** That night, an extra trail-camera outside the trap documented the arrival of the sounder (left) at 10:47 p.m., and seven minutes later (right) the trap doors are closed.





trap, it may take an additional week or more for the majority of the sounder to regularly venture inside to feed. Continue to monitor your trail-camera during pre-baiting or rake areas smooth inside the trap and watch for tracks if a camera is not being employed. Gradually place more of the chum in the back of the trap to train the hogs to feed all way in the back.

It is common for at least a couple of weeks to elapse from initial pre-baiting until hogs are regularly entering the trap. Again, pressured hogs will be much slower to respond – and those that have experienced the inside of a trap before may not ever enter one a second time.

Once pre-baiting is successful and the hogs are *routinely* entering the trap and feeding all the way toward the back, it's time to prepare the gate.

### Gate Options

At this point, close the gate ends of the panels and attach them to your gate, which should be wired in the “open” position. If the gate itself is not 5 feet tall, a piece of paneling must be placed above the gate to bring it up to the height of the trap.

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## MYTHBUSTING: FERAL HOG FACT & FICTION



TES RANDLE JOLLY

There is a lot of misinformation out there about feral hogs – some of it presented by biologists. Here are some common statements heard or read in the media, and the facts supported by research.

*“Feral hog populations can double every four months (in Texas).”*

**Fact:** Feral hog populations are increasing at approximately 18 to 20 percent annually in Texas. At that rate of growth and left unchecked, populations would take about four years to double in size.

*“Feral hog sows have three litters per year and 10 to 12 pigs per litter.”*

**Fact:** Mature sows average 1.5 litters per year with an average litter size of five to six pigs.

*“There are 4 million feral hogs in Texas and 6 million in the U.S.”*

**Fact:** This was nothing more than a “guesstimate” – until now. The Institute for Renewable Natural Resources at Texas A&M University was able to take the results of eight Texas hog studies and use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to provide a science-based estimate of 2.6 million feral hogs in Texas.

*“We cannot win the war against feral hogs”*

**Fact:** While we cannot eradicate firmly established feral hog populations like those in most southern states with the current legal control tools available today, Texas AgriLife Extension Service studies have clearly shown that agricultural economic damage can be reduced by as much as 66 percent through control efforts.



**Above:** Peach-flavored pork is loaded and ready for transport to a “buying station” in Texas, where they will be processed for food. If this option is unavailable in your state, all feral hogs should be dispatched on the property where they were trapped. It is unethical and illegal to transport hogs for release at another location. **Left:** Note the board covering the hole beneath the livestock trailer to prevent escape when the hogs are loaded.



All you need now is a little more time to train the hogs to enter through the gate, and after that capture becomes a relatively simple matter.

Where do you acquire a gate? Commercially made gates (and in fact entire traps for that matter) are available from numerous sources; just do an Internet search for “hog trap gates.” For the do-it-yourselfers, anybody with a welder and a little time can build a functional gate. Our Texas AgriLife Extension Web site offers pictures and diagrams of some gate designs, plus lots of other information on feral hogs – <http://feralhogs.tamu.edu>.

Which type of gate is best? I have used them all: guillotine, saloon door, one-way rooster and swinging door. Even the “no

gate” trap design can be employed (Think of a “figure 9.” The hogs hit the tail of the figure and push through the narrow opening into the “eye” of the 9, but they cannot find that opening to go back out).

It’s much harder to load hogs out of the no-gate design, so I seldom use it. In the end, the gate design you select is not nearly as important as the process of trapping.

If you have prepared everything correctly up to this point, the actual trapping phase is a slam dunk. Set the gate to trip on a date of your choosing, and be prepared to wrangle hogs!

On the afternoon the gate is engaged and set to catch hogs, the baiting pattern becomes key. Offer bait immediately outside the gate and through the gate opening as usual, then pour small piles of bait at intervals of 5 to 10 feet between the gate and the trigger. Then, pour copious amounts of bait along the trigger wire itself to ensure a trip. The idea is for the

hogs to feed their way back to the trigger, not rush to it. This will allow as many hogs as possible to enter the trap before the first one trips the trigger.

The camera should continue to record during the actual trapping phase. One picture is worth a thousand words when it comes to determining how many members of the sounder were actually inside the trap when it tripped. Were there hogs still outside when the gate was tripped, or were they simply AWOL that particular night? A quick count of the captured hogs reveals how many more you have to go.

The jury is still out as to whether “sounder stragglers” will push through a gate once it has been tripped. If you want to hedge your bets, use a saloon door, swinging door or rooster gate that can be opened from the outside if anyone is feeling left out once the party has begun.

### Trapping Big Boars

Big boars are rather solitary and notorious for visiting a chum site on a different schedule than sounders. To catch these boars after a sounder has been successfully captured, try rigging a short trigger requiring the boar to enter the trap just a few



Solitary boars may need to be captured singly after the main sounder has been removed. A short trigger rigged just inside the gate will do the trick.

feet before triggering the gate to close – no need to try and entice them to the very back of the trap.

Another old trick for big boars is to place a few sows in a pen within the trap. This takes time, and you have to provide the sows with a daily supply of shade, water and food, but nothing draws trap-wary boars like the sweet smell of estrus.

### Hog Heaven

All hogs trapped need to have a one-way ticket punched to hog heaven. It is

unethical and very likely illegal in your state to trap, move and re-release feral hogs. If you hire someone to trap hogs for you, take steps to ensure that all hogs trapped are destroyed and not transported for re-release.

I do not like to dispatch the hogs in the trap if I can avoid it. I prefer to load them and move them away from the trap site, to a buying station if your state offers this option, or away from the trap to be dispatched to minimize disturbance in the trapping area. If you are going to destroy the hogs yourself, first consult your state's regulations on carcass disposal.

Whether taking your hogs to a buying station or moving to another site for dispatch, trailering the hogs is easy if your trap was designed for this end. Simply back a livestock trailer up to the gate opening, placing a board between the gate and trailer to prevent escape beneath the trailer. Then, wire the gate open and send one person wide around the trap to the opposite end. The hogs will respond by funneling toward the gate and self-load as the second person closes the trailer door.

If you have ever been disappointed when you set a hog trap one day and failed

## MEET BILLY HIGGINBOTHAM

Dr. Billy Higginbotham is a professor and Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Specialist with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Billy will be one of the featured speakers at the QDMA's National Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. The Whitetail Wisdom Pro Speaker series on Thursday, August 11, will focus on the impact of coyotes and feral hogs on deer populations, and how to control them. Billy will cover feral hog control and trapping techniques, expanding on the information provided in this article. To register for the National Convention, visit [www.QDMA.com](http://www.QDMA.com).



to catch hogs the next, now you know why. Trapping hogs is a process that begins with chumming and monitoring with a remote trail-camera. Chumming, the use of trail-cameras, the right trapping equipment set in the right location and patience on your part make for a successful hog-trapping formula!



### About This Article

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