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Dr. Susan Culp Receives Southwest Veterinary Symposium Visionary of the Year Award



Texas Animal Health Commission veterinarian Dr. Susan Culp (third from left) receives SWVS Visionary of the Year Award

Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) member Dr. Susan Culp was recently honored at the Southwest Veterinary Symposium (SWVS) with the 2014 Visionary of the Year Award. Dr. Culp is the lead veterinarian for the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) Authorized Personnel Programs.

The SWVS Visionary of the Year Award is intended to honor an individual who is recognized by the profession and is actively engaged in private, public or corporate veterinary practice and whose contributions elevate the standards and

goals of veterinary medicine.

SWVS is a partnership combining the efforts of the Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas veterinary medical associations to provide exceptional continuing education for veterinary professionals in the Southwest region and the rest of the nation.

Dr. Culp is responsible for overseeing the TAHC's Authorized Personnel Program training for both veterinarians and non-veterinary professionals. This new Authorized Personnel Program launched on September 1, 2014.

"The Texas Animal Health Commission is pleased to have Dr. Culp as part of the TAHC family," TAHC Executive Director and State Veterinarian Dr. Dee Ellis said. "She has proven to be a tremendous asset to the agency. This award is truly deserved."

Dr. Culp received her DVM from the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine in 2001 and her undergraduate degree in wildlife biology from Texas State University in San Marcos. She practiced companion animal medicine, surgery and veterinary acupuncture in Austin for 12 years prior to joining TAHC. [TV](#)



ARE FERAL SWINE BAD NEIGHBORS?



By Dee Ellis, DVM, MPA,
State Veterinarian/Executive
Director of the Texas Animal
Health Commission

I was sitting in the audience at the Texas Capitol in Austin recently awaiting my turn to speak as invited testimony to a joint House Agriculture and Livestock and House Culture, Tourism and Recreation Committee meeting on how to eradicate feral swine when the irony of it all hit home to me. As a veterinarian who went to school to help animals and took an oath to do the same when I graduated, I was about to speak on my view of how to help kill every feral swine in Texas. I heard others discuss shooting them for sport, trapping them for a bounty, poisoning them, running them off and possibly sterilizing them. The legislators listened intently and asked many questions of all the speakers.

No one mentioned, however, the thought that kept running through my mind. I didn't hear anyone say, "There is no way we will ever eradicate feral swine in this great state, and I am not sure we should even if we could." So I told them that, at my own risk of course, as that is not what I thought they wanted to hear.

I told them that feral swine spread diseases to livestock and companion animals. I told them that feral swine tear up golf courses and cropland, eat sea turtle eggs and pose a public health risk. I told them that feral swine are bad neighbors in general. But then I told them the truth. Texas is simply too big, and we have three million feral swine spread out across it. Can we really believe we can kill every wild hog from Amarillo to Brownsville and Beaumont to Van Horn without harming other interests? Notice I said Van Horn and not El Paso because my understanding is that every county in Texas except El Paso County has reported the presence of feral swine.

Feral swine are incredibly smart, resilient, tasty, tough, crafty, cagey and, most of all, profitable for some folks. That is why they are so much fun to hunt, so much fun to chase late at night in the woods with dogs, so much fun to watch on your game camera and finally so much fun to catch in

your trap, whether it is to eat or sell them.

Yes, they spread swine brucellosis to cattle, swine and humans. Yes, they spread pseudorabies to a number of livestock species and more and more commonly to dogs. Yes, they pose a continued risk as a reservoir for foreign and emerging diseases in general. Yes, they are job security for animal health officials. But they sure can be fun.

That is the challenge of production agriculture (including their affiliated veterinarians) in general. White-tail deer spread tuberculosis in Michigan, elk spread brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area, nilgai are spreading fever ticks in South Texas, and feral swine spread a whole list of diseases. Nonetheless, they generate profitable industries in their own right, are enjoyable to watch in their wild habitat and are exciting to hunt if you are so inclined. For those reasons, I don't believe agricultural interests can make them disappear. Thus the irony of an agriculture committee meeting with a recreation committee with the premise of killing them all when, in truth, even if there were a way to do it, it would eventually result in a huge outcry from citizens resisting the idea.

How can you create a targeted delivery system for a poison that does not affect anything else? Human health, safe food supplies, wildlife and even bugs could be threatened, or, at the least, you would have to prove that they weren't. Proving a negative is difficult. We have been trying to finalize approval for use in South Texas of a product that is a mixture of molasses and Ivermectin to be fed to cattle where there are fever ticks so they can self-medicate themselves by licking the treated molasses blocks. Even though both of those components are legal to use individually, one of the challenges to the idea was that this new combination could adversely affect dung beetles. Enough said.

So even though feral swine are bad neighbors, we might as well accept the fact that some people like wild hogs and some people's livelihoods depend on

them, and they will "fight for their (wild pigs') right to party" as the old song goes. That party spirit means wild hogs will continue to eat whatever they want, breed whatever other pigs they want, fight whatever they want and basically go wherever they want unless controlled.

That was my suggestion to the committees. Think about selective control instead of eradication. Let's continue development of effective poisons with precise delivery systems, explore biologic controls like sterility or genetic modification to create male-only offspring, create effective outreach campaigns and encourage legal hunting and trapping. Most importantly, though, we must understand that controlling this species where it causes damage is realistic but eradication is not.

For veterinarians, that means we need to advise our clients whose children are raising show pigs about biosecurity and preventative vaccinations. We should advise our clients about the public health risks of butchering wild hogs. We can educate them about the risk of disease to their hunting dogs and be aware that swine diseases can affect any outdoor dogs. And, finally, we can enjoy hunting them and chasing them around just like everyone else seems to do.

The economic impact of feral swine is incredible. A recent hog dog contest in East Texas had 3,000 dogs participate. That is reality.

In summation, I would suggest we all take a step back from another possible battle between the apparent interests of agriculture and outdoor recreation. Neither side is going to win. As veterinarians, we should try and help bridge the gap between conflicting interests by providing sound advice to help our clients, communities and state be as safe and healthy as possible while trying to figure out how to live with this "bad neighbor." He is living in all of our neighborhoods, and I am afraid he is here to stay. [TV](#)