

Destruction of Gophers a Necessity

The Losses Caused by these Small but Enormously Prevalent Pests Total Many Millions Annually

By Frank W. Skinner

Let me jar you with a few figures. In the three Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta there are 479,162,438 acres. Of this 200,000,000 acres are arable.

In many parts of these provinces, all of which are infested with gophers, there are upwards of 50 gophers per acre.

Taking the arable land in these provinces as a basis, allowing 10 gophers to the acre, shows that Western Canada is one vast gopher boarding house with something like 2,000,000,000 perfectly worthless, deadbeat guests.

Gophers multiply with amazing rapidity. An enormous death rate is required to keep them in check.

Their natural enemies (hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes, weasels, and such creatures), to which the gopher is a staple of diet, are being vastly reduced in numbers, and gophers are rapidly increasing.

Damages Gophers Cause

The worst of all gopher damage is the destruction of the young grain plants.

In early spring the gopher is hungrier than at any other time. His long winter nap has consumed all the nourishment that was stored away in his fat little carcass when he went to sleep in the fall.

When the grain comes up, he makes up for lost time. What a capacity he has! When his appetite is satisfied, there are vastly less grain plants to mature.

A careful check shows that each pair of gophers either eats or destroys a bushel of grain per year.

See this Damage in Dollars

What a stupendous total the gopher damage really amounts to! These are amazing figures. Granting our previous estimates to be somewhere nearly correct, the loss would amount to 1,000,000,000 bushels of grain, or at the 1916 wheat prices, something like \$2,000,000,000.

These figures must be proportioned to the number of acres tilled which is, roughly speaking, about one-tenth of the total arable. That leaves the trifling sum of \$200,000,000 dead loss.

Think of it! \$25 for every man, woman and child in the Dominion!

Versatile Destroyers

Gophers not only destroy the crops, but when their number increases, as it often does, they render the land totally unfit for tillage. Their holes provide avenues for drainage which leaves the top soil without moisture.

They do not confine their depredations to grain crops, but feast upon clover, alfalfa; in fact, practically every plant of value.

Can the Damage be Stopped?

Many farmers will tell you it can't be done. And they will put the case so convincingly that you are likely to believe them.

They will tell you that you can't shoot or trap enough to make any impression on the total. That is true.

They will tell you that you can poison every gopher on your farm today, get every last one of them, but others will come in from nearby vacant land. And that is also true.

They will tell you that hundreds of farmers are too intent upon "mining

the wealth out of their good fresh soil," so that they won't do their share. And again that is true.

But the fact remains that any one farmer who cares to go to the trouble can keep the gophers on his land in check. It will mean constant vigilance, but it's worth it.

How to Exterminate Gophers

In a recent statement, Professor V. W. Jackson, of the Manitoba Agricultural College, says that a careful survey of twenty-five townships in Manitoba, the least over-run of the Western Provinces, there were fully nine million gophers, causing an annual loss of not less than \$2,250,000.00. Quoting his statement further, he says:

"These reliable figures show that in many townships the loss due to gophers exceeds the cost of seed grain, or \$2.50 per acre, and in many townships double this loss. In view of the fact that the cost of treating infested land with a reliable gopher poison is less than three cents per acre and which,

if systematically applied at the right season, gets the gopher, it is apparent that this enormous loss could be saved."

The poison to which he refers is presumably Kill-Em-Quick, the poison recommended by the College, as an effective gopher poison, which costs the user one cent an acre. However, his estimate probably includes the value of the grain or feed in addition to the poison.

The remainder of Professor Jackson's statement is worthy of close consideration.

What is Being Done

"The Biology Department of the Manitoba Agricultural College took up the gopher problem this spring. Posters were gotten out and distributed all over the Province calling attention to the loss due to gophers, and the various ways to get the gopher. A field man, Mr. J. H. Kitley, was sent into the worst districts and was assisted in other parts of the Province

by the District Representatives. Owing to the scarcity of strychnine, and its prohibitive price (over \$2.00 per ounce), well known prepared gopher poisons were recommended, and one firm volunteered to give free samples.

"Over 400 free packages were thus distributed and over 1,500 larger packages treating 80 to 160 acres each, were sold at prices usually given to municipalities; and if local druggists and others throughout the Province have sold three times as much, it means 6,000 packages, or an expenditure of about \$3,000.00 to prevent a \$3,000,000.00 loss.

"It is therefore evident that we are not making an adequate effort to control the gopher. The lateness of the spring prevented the farmer from treating his land early, and the wetness of the season made such a green growth that the gopher was more difficult to get than usual; but from every trial, we got satisfactory results, and reports from all over the Province on the effectiveness of gopher poison. An interest has been aroused this year which should be continued and followed up. Our experience and success this year warrant recommendations in dealing with the gopher problem, which we beg to submit.

"First, that a Provincial Gopher Act, similar to the Noxious Weed Act, be passed, making the treatment of gopher infested land compulsory, and permitting municipalities to treat vacant lands and charge to the absentee owners. The great barrier to individual effort seems to be the vacant lands. Scores of farmers give this as a reason for not treating their land. Gophers can move about more readily than weeds, and at all seasons, making the vacant land a greater menace from gophers than from weeds. Others say that it is useless to put out gopher poison when neighbors neglect to control their gophers and when vacant lands serve as breeding grounds. Uniformity and co-operation are necessary to get the gopher, and there seems a general desire for a Provincial Act to ensure control and save this loss of several million dollars.

"Second, we believe that the Municipal Weed Inspectors are the proper agents to enforce and carry out such a gopher act. This would not interfere with their regular duties, but simply extend their working season, which they complain is too short to be profitable. Their duties begin on May 15th, before which time the gopher land should be treated. Being a Municipal Agent, he could act in unison with the Municipal Council in dealing with vacant lands."

"While this plan is undoubtedly the most feasible way to wipe out the gopher pest, it would be fully for the individual farmer to let the gophers run unchecked until it can be carried out. Such an undertaking cannot be accomplished over night.

Each farmer, who cares to do so, can protect his crop even now, by consistently treating his land with Kill-Em-Quick. He may have to do so oftener than if the land around him is also treated, but even so, it will pay him well to do it. Three or four treatments of the land lying next to untreated land will serve to hold the gophers in check to a satisfying degree after his entire farm has once been properly treated.

This work should be done in the early spring. It may be continued at a profit throughout the growing season, but the spring is vastly the most important time to be on guard.

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That's all you need to do—the gopher's voracious appetite will do the rest.

Read this Experimental Test Report

Here's an extract from a letter written to us by Professor V. W. Jackson, of the Manitoba Agricultural College, under whose direction a test of Kill-Em-Quick was made late last spring.

"Of the four hundred letters which I received this summer, from farmers who had tried your poison on our advice, and with our assistance, all but one reported having satisfactory results."

"We are therefore prepared to recommend Kill-Em-Quick as an effective gopher poison next year."

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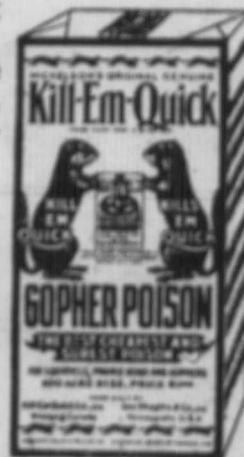
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