

# Hog-Gone It!

## *There's a New Pig Poison in Texas*

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Photo by **RUSSELL GRAVES**



*This article was originally posted on the Oct. 12 MultiBriefs online news site. It has been updated in-part by its author John McAdams and is reprinted here with his permission.*

Even though efforts to authorize use of the controversial warfarin-based hog poison commercially known as Kaput® met with stiff resistance and ultimately failed, that has not stopped scientists from looking for other tools to use for hog control in Texas. For instance, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is currently experimenting with a sodium nitrite hog poison known as Hog-Gone®, produced by Animal Control Technologies of Australia.

Researchers first started experimenting with sodium nitrite as a hog control tool in Australia back in 2005. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has studied the poison at the Kerr Wildlife Management Area northwest of San Antonio for nearly a decade as well. In an effort to build on the research conducted at the Kerr Wildlife Management Area, the USDA began conducting further testing of Hog-Gone® at Camp Bullis, an Army installation near San Antonio.

Though sodium nitrite is best known as a meat preservative used for curing bacon, hogs are also very sensitive to the substance. If a hog consumes a lethal dose of sodium nitrite within a short enough period of time, it will go to sleep and die from a lack of oxygen to the brain within a few hours.

Compared to warfarin, sodium nitrite has several advantages: it's inexpensive; it kills hogs relatively quickly and humanely; and the risk to non-target species like vultures, coyotes and whitetail deer is much lower.

On the other hand, sodium nitrite tastes terrible, so researchers had to figure out a way to get hogs to consume a lethal dose. Hog-Gone's® developers may have solved that problem by encasing a lethal dose of sodium nitrite in a protective coating that dissolves in the animal's stomach, but prevents the hog from smelling or tasting the poison.

In late 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued an experimental use permit for continued field research of Hog-Gone®. Researchers plan to conduct more advanced testing of the poison in 2018 under varied environmental conditions in West Texas and Alabama.

The experiments will be centered on feeders specifically designed to prevent access by animals other than hogs. After identifying specific local sounders of feral hogs, researchers plan to condition the animals to eat from the feeders by using a non-toxic placebo. Once the hogs are reliably eating from the feeders, the researchers will then add the sodium nitrite poison to the feeders and evaluate the results.

As when introducing any toxic substance to the environment, there are a number of potential problems that accompany the use of sodium nitrite as a hog pesticide. For instance, non-target species such as deer and raccoons, which scientists are particularly concerned about, are virtually guaranteed to consume some poison from bait stations. Vultures and coyotes also have the potential for exposure to sodium nitrite after eating dead hogs that ate a lethal dose. There is also a risk that hunters will kill and eat a hog that consumed some sodium nitrite as well.

However, those concerns are among the reasons why TPWD and the USDA are continuing to experiment with sodium nitrite. If these field trials go well and Hog-Gone® proves to be effective at killing hogs while posing minimal risks to the environment, it probably won't receive final EPA approval until 2020 at the earliest.

Even if that ends up happening, don't count on Hog-Gone® being a silver bullet in the war on feral hogs. While an effective poison will undoubtedly help efforts to keep their numbers under control, hogs are very intelligent and adaptable animals. They are probably here to stay. The best we can hope for is keeping their populations at a somewhat more manageable number and minimizing the amount of damage they can do. ☺