

# Researchers surveying landowners about economic damage caused by feral swine

February 5 2015, by Sandi Martin

---

University of Georgia researchers have begun surveying landowners in parts of Georgia to assess how much economic damage feral swine are causing throughout the state.

A new [survey](#), "Feral Swine on Private Lands in Georgia," has been mailed to 3,000 landowners across Georgia and is being conducted by Michael Mengak and students in UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

Feral swine root, wallow, trample, prey on livestock and are generally very aggressive. They also reproduce rapidly, travel in large groups and thrive in a variety of habitats. Controlling their populations has been an issue, and often landowners turn to state and local agencies or private businesses for help with varying success.

Feral swine—also called [feral pigs](#), wild pigs, [feral hogs](#), wild hogs and wild boar—are estimated to cause in excess of \$1.5 billion in damage nationwide, said Mengak, a professor and wildlife specialist. The survey is jointly funded by UGA Extension and the Warnell School.

"It is important to understand the nature of [feral swine](#) problems and the damage they cause on a local scale," he said. "This information informs the Georgia state legislature and natural resource managers of the damage and financial hardship feral swine inflict on farmers and other landowners in Georgia."

Mengak and UGA Extension last surveyed landowners about feral swine in 2012. Results from that survey were compiled to calculate the economic damages caused by feral swine, typically on farmland through rooting, grubbing and destroying crops of peanuts, corn and cotton. The totals showed that feral swine caused more than \$81 million in damage to crops and farmland in 41 Georgia counties in 2011, he said.

The new eight-page survey asks landowners questions about issues they've noticed with feral swine, how they attempt to control swing on their properties and whether they feel feral swine are a nuisance or a benefit. The survey was mailed to landowners who met two criteria—registered farmers and rural landowners outside of metro areas who own at least five acres of land. Survey recipients were randomly selected from a large Georgia database.

Questions include when they first noticed damage, what kind of damage feral swine caused, what methods they used to control the feral swine—including lethal means—and how much money they estimate they've lost due to the feral swine. Researchers also want to know if any landowners prefer to see feral swine on their properties and their opinions on whether they think the swine carry disease or are harmful to other wildlife.

"From our previous survey, farmers told us feral swine are very destructive and not welcome in the environment," Mengak said.

Landowners who receive the survey are asked to fill in as much as they can or wish to, then mail it back within two weeks, Mengak said. Survey responses will remain anonymous, and recipients are provided with a free postage-paid envelope for returning the survey.

It is thought that feral swine were introduced to the U.S. by the Spanish in the mid-1500s. They were found in just 17 states in 1982, but the U.S.

Department of Agriculture finds they have now spread to 41 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands.

The survey also asks about control methods and landowners' opinions on their effectiveness, including hunting. The 2015 survey asks if landowners hunt feral swine on their property or allow others to do so.

"Hunting may take a few animals but it will never be a solution to this problem," he said.

Intensive trapping is the best method of control at this time. "Poison or toxicants are not legal methods for controlling feral swine," he added.

Georgia's Wildlife Resource Division and Department of Agriculture enforce feral swine laws in Georgia.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services has in the past offered management solutions at a local level, but it is considering implementing a tougher management program that would span the country. However, the agency wants to see what [landowners](#) think before finalizing the plan. Their environmental impact statement is under review.

"Decision makers and land managers in Georgia will be better informed about the extent and nature of the feral swine problem once results from the current survey are compiled and summarized," Mengak said.

Provided by University of Georgia

Citation: Researchers surveying landowners about economic damage caused by feral swine (2015, February 5) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-surveying->

[landowners-economic-feral-swine.html](http://landowners-economic-feral-swine.html)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.