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Review Article

Control Rodents at Poultry Farms to Mitigate the Risk of Salmonella. A Comprehensive Review

Mubarik Ali[a], Norina Jabeen[b], Qamar Ullah[c], Hafiz Abdul Majid[d], Abdul Wadood Jan[e], Hamza Maris[f], Muhammad Atif [g]

[a] Animal Science Institute, National Agricultural Research Center, Islamabad-54000-Pakistan
[b] Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad-37000-Pakistan
[c] Veterinary Research Center, Lakki Marwat-28420-Pakistan
[d] Veterinary Research and Disease Investigation Center, Kohat-26000-Pakistan
[e] Civil Veterinary Hospital, Dera Ismail Khan-29050-Pakistan
[f] Faculty of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan-29050-Pakistan
[g] Poultry Research Institute Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan

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***Corresponding Author:**
Mubarik Ali
Animal Science Institute, National Agricultural Research Center, Islamabad-54000-Pakistan
mubarikalicheema@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A major but sometimes underestimated problem in chicken farms are rodent infestations, which seriously compromise public safety, health and economy. The function of rats as Salmonella carriers is investigated in this thorough overview together with their effects on public health, poultry health and farm output. Particularly rats and mice, rodents may readily access feed, water and nesting sites inside poultry farms, therefore contaminating the food and spreading diseases as well as causing damage to the infrastructure. Main disease connected to rodent activities, salmonella can contaminate the surroundings and infect poultry by means of rodent urine, saliva and feces. This impairs poultry health and product safety in turn, therefore allowing Salmonella-contaminated eggs and meat to find their way into the human food chain. Emphasizing an integrated pest management method including cleanliness, physical barriers, traps, baits and biological control techniques, the review investigated the successful rodent control strategies. Part of the complete control plan is also the possible employment of contemporary surveillance technologies such motion-activated cameras and remote monitoring systems based on LoRaWAN. These techniques help chicken growers lower disease transmission, control rodent numbers and protect public health in addition to poultry.

INTRODUCTION

Poultry farming, a longstanding cornerstone of global agriculture, stands at the forefront of food production, meeting the demands of a rapidly growing population. These farms, while crucial, are also susceptible to a myriad of challenges, with disease control being paramount among them. When one imagines threats to poultry health, the mind may wander to viral diseases or malnutrition; however, often overlooked are the more insidious risks posed by common pests: rodents. These seemingly inconspicuous creatures, pervasive in many agricultural environments, play a disproportionately large role in the transmission of harmful pathogens. One pathogen of significant concern that is closely associated with rodent activity is salmonella [1].

The presence of rodents in poultry farms is not a new phenomenon. For as long as humans have engaged in agriculture, rodents have been opportunistic invaders, lured by the promise of abundant food and shelter. In the context of a poultry farm, this means easy access to feed, water, and nesting sites. However, beyond the immediate nuisances and economic costs associated with feed loss and infrastructural damage, lies the more severe threat of disease transmission. Rodents are reservoirs for many zoonotic diseases, which are diseases that can be transferred from animals to humans. Among these, salmonella stands out due to its potential to drastically impact poultry health and subsequently enter the human food chain, posing grave health risks [2].

Salmonella, a bacterium that affects the intestinal tract, has a longstanding history of being a public health concern. Its effects range from mild gastrointestinal discomfort in some to severe complications, and even death in others, especially among vulnerable groups. In poultry, the bacterium not only affects the health of the birds, leading to decreased productivity, but also poses a contamination risk for eggs and meat, making it a dual threat. Given that the primary mode of salmonella transmission within poultry farms is through fecal contamination, the role of rodents becomes alarmingly clear. Rodent droppings, often teeming with salmonella bacteria, can easily contaminate feed, water, equipment, and the environment, providing multiple avenues for poultry to come in contact with the pathogen [3].

However, the implications of this issue go beyond poultry health. With globalization and the interconnectedness of food supply chains, a localized disease outbreak can have ramifications that span continents. Salmonella-contaminated products can quickly find their way into kitchens around the world, making the challenge of rodent control not just a localized farm issue but a global public health priority. Furthermore, the socio-economic consequences of salmonella outbreaks, driven by rodent infestations, can be crippling for poultry businesses, both large and small. Recalls, lawsuits, treatment costs, and the intangible damage to brand reputation can set businesses back by years [4].

In light of these challenges, it becomes evident that the task at hand is not merely about pest control. It's about ensuring the safety and quality of a vital food source, preserving the economic stability of a crucial industry, and safeguarding public health at a global scale. This study explored the intricate relationship between rodents and salmonella in poultry farms, understanding the myriad challenges posed by this association, and elucidate the strategies and solutions to effectively tackle this pressing concern [5].

The Rodent Problem in Poultry Farms

Poultry farming, vital to many economies worldwide, faces multifaceted challenges daily. One of these challenges, often underestimated in its impact, is the persistent problem of rodents (Figure 1). The presence of these pests in poultry farms has long been recognized, but the full extent of their influence on the well-being of the flock and the broader implications for the poultry industry and public health is worth a deep exploration (Table 1).

Magnitude of the Issue

Rodents, primarily rats and mice, are ubiquitous in many environments, and poultry farms offer them an enticing haven. With readily available food from spilled or poorly stored feed, easy access to water, and abundant nesting materials and sites, these farms inadvertently roll out a welcome mat for these pests. The rapid reproductive rates of rodents mean that a small, unchecked population can quickly explode into a major infestation [6].

Direct Economic Impact

The immediate and most tangible consequence of rodent presence is economic loss. Rodents consume significant amounts of feed. It's estimated that one rat can consume approximately 25 to 30 grams of feed daily. When you extrapolate this to a large population of rats in a farm setting, the numbers become staggering. This is not to mention the wastage from contamination due to their droppings, urine, and nesting activities (Table 2).

Furthermore, rodents can cause considerable structural damage. They gnaw on building materials, insulation, and even electrical wirings, which not only requires

costly repairs but can also pose fire hazards [7].

Health of the Flock

Rodents are carriers of various diseases, some of which can be transmitted to poultry. They can introduce parasites like mites and lice to the flock. Moreover, they are vectors for various bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens. One of the most notorious among these is salmonella, but there are others like *E. coli*, avian influenza, and Newcastle disease. Such diseases can lead to decreased egg production, poor growth rates, and increased mortality [8].

Public Health Implications

The rodent problem isn't restricted to the boundaries of the poultry farm. The pathogens that rodents introduce can find their way into the human food chain. Salmonella, for instance, when transmitted to the flock, can contaminate eggs and meat. Humans consuming these products can contract salmonellosis, a disease that can range from mild symptoms to severe, life-threatening complications, especially in vulnerable populations [9].

The Broader Perspective

Salmonella, a genus of bacteria that has been responsible for numerous foodborne illness outbreaks worldwide, can be transmitted through various means. One of the key vectors often overlooked, yet critically important, especially in agricultural settings like poultry farms, are rodents (Figure 2). Understanding the link between rodents and the transmission of salmonella is crucial to ensuring food safety, mitigating economic losses in the poultry industry, and protecting public health [11].

Rodents as Reservoirs

Rodents, particularly rats and mice, are natural reservoirs for a plethora of pathogens, among which is salmonella. The digestive tracts of these pests can harbor the bacteria, often without manifesting any disease symptoms in the rodents themselves. This asymptomatic carriage means that rodents can easily spread the bacteria in their environment without any obvious signs of illness [12].

Modes of Transmission

There are several ways in which rodents can introduce salmonella to a poultry farm:

1. **Fecal Contamination**: The primary mode of salmonella transmission is fecal-oral. Infected rodents excrete the bacteria in their droppings. These droppings can then contaminate feed, water, equipment, or the environment, providing multiple pathways for poultry to ingest the bacteria.
2. **Urine and Saliva**: Apart from feces, rodent urine and saliva can also be sources of salmonella. Contamination can occur when rodents come into contact with or consume poultry feed, or when they access water sources meant for the poultry.
3. **Cadavers**: Dead rodents can also be sources of contamination. If not promptly and properly disposed of, the decomposition process can lead to the bacteria being introduced into the environment.
4. **Direct Contact**: Occasionally, direct contact between poultry and rodents can also lead to transmission, especially if the poultry peck at rodent droppings or dead rodents [8].

Implications for Poultry

Once introduced to poultry, salmonella can rapidly spread through the flock. Birds can shed the bacteria in their droppings, leading to a cycle of contamination where the bacteria are reintroduced to other birds. This not only affects the health of the flock—leading to symptoms like diarrhea, reduced appetite, and increased mortality—but also poses significant risks to humans when infected birds enter the food chain.

The journey of salmonella from rodents to poultry and then to humans underscores the public health risk posed by rodent infestations in poultry farms. Infected poultry can produce eggs or meat contaminated with salmonella. When consumed by humans, especially if undercooked or raw, these products can cause salmonellosis, a disease characterized by diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. In severe cases or in vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals, the disease can be fatal [13].

IMPLICATIONS OF SALMONELLA CONTAMINATION

Salmonella, a notorious bacterial pathogen, has been at the epicenter of numerous public health crises worldwide. Its ability to contaminate a vast array of foods, especially poultry products, makes it a persistent concern for both the food industry and public health officials. Understanding the implications of salmonella contamination is crucial to comprehending the severity of its presence and the broad-reaching impact it can have on society, economy, and health systems (Table 3).

1. Public Health Implications

Widespread Illness: Salmonella is responsible for a significant number of foodborne illnesses annually. Infected individuals can experience symptoms ranging from mild gastrointestinal distress to severe dehydration and bloody diarrhea.

i. **Hospitalizations:** Severe cases of salmonellosis, the disease caused by Salmonella bacteria, can result in hospitalization. Vulnerable groups, such as young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems, are especially at risk.

ii. **Fatalities:** In extreme cases, especially if not treated promptly or effectively, salmonellosis can lead to death. Secondary complications, like septicemia or infections spreading to the bloodstream, further amplify the risk.

iii. **Long-Term Health Effects:** Even after recovery, some individuals might experience post-infection complications like Reiter's syndrome, which can lead to chronic arthritis.

2. Economic Implications

i. **Recalls:** Food products identified as potential sources of salmonella outbreaks often need to be recalled. This process is not only logistically challenging but also expensive.

ii. **Loss of Sales:** Fear and mistrust among consumers after an outbreak can result in decreased sales for affected brands or products, even if they are subsequently deemed safe.

iii. **Litigation Costs:** Affected individuals may resort to legal actions against companies responsible for contaminated products, leading to potentially massive settlements or court judgments.

iv. **Impact on Export and Trade:** Countries with recurrent salmonella outbreaks might face export restrictions, impacting the national economy, particularly if poultry or related products are significant exports [11].

3. Industry Implications

i. **Reputation Damage:** A salmonella outbreak can cause irreparable damage to a company's reputation, with recovery taking years or even decades.

ii. **Increased Regulation:** Frequent contamination issues can lead to tighter regulations and oversight, potentially increasing operational costs for businesses.

4. Societal Implications

i. **Fear and Mistrust:** Recurrent outbreaks can lead to widespread public mistrust in food safety standards, leading to changes in buying behaviors or shifts towards alternative foods.

ii. **Strain on Health Systems:** Large-scale outbreaks can overwhelm local health care facilities, diverting resources from other essential services.

CONSEQUENCES OF SALMONELLOSIS IN POULTRY

1. Health of the Flock:

i. **Mortality Rate:** There can be a noticeable increase in the death rate among infected birds, especially if the infection is not addressed promptly or adequately.

ii. **Reduced Productivity:** Infected birds often exhibit stunted growth and decreased weight gain. This has direct implications for the profitability of meat-producing operations.

iii. **Decreased Egg Production:** Layers infected with salmonella might produce fewer eggs, and the quality of the eggs may also be compromised.

iv. **Secondary Infections:** Birds weakened by a salmonella infection may become more susceptible to other diseases or infections, compounding the challenges faced by the flock [14].

2. Economic Implications

i. **Loss in Revenue:** With decreased meat and egg production, the financial returns of poultry operations can take a significant hit.

ii. **Increased Veterinary Costs:** Addressing the outbreak often means bringing in veterinary experts and possibly administering medications or vaccines, adding to operational costs.

iii. **Waste of Resources:** Infected feed, water, or even the infrastructure compromised by an outbreak may need to be discarded or thoroughly disinfected, leading to additional expenses [16].

3. Food Safety and Public Health Concerns

i. **Contaminated Products:** The meat or eggs from infected poultry can carry the salmonella bacteria, posing a direct risk to consumers.

ii. **Outbreaks:** Consumption of products from infected birds can

lead to outbreaks of salmonellosis among humans. Symptoms include diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps.

iii. **Long-Term Health Complications:** Beyond the immediate symptoms, some individuals might suffer from prolonged complications like reactive arthritis.

4. Regulatory and Trade Implications

i. **Increased Scrutiny:** Infected farms might face more stringent oversight from regulatory bodies, which could mandate more frequent inspections and higher standards of operation.

ii. **Trade Restrictions:** Countries or regions with recurrent salmonella issues in poultry may experience barriers to exporting poultry products, affecting the broader agricultural economy.

iii. **Recalls:** If contaminated products make it to the market, there might be product recalls, which are costly and damage brand reputation.

5. Environmental Concerns:

i. **Spread to Local Wildlife:** Salmonella bacteria can potentially spread to local wildlife that interacts with or is in the vicinity of infected poultry or their waste, leading to broader ecological implications.

ii. **Water Contamination:** Improper disposal of waste from infected poultry might contaminate local water sources [14].

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE RODENT CONTROL IN POULTRY FARMS

Rodent infestations in poultry farms are not only a nuisance but also pose significant health risks to the birds (Figure 3), lead to economic losses, and can contribute to the spread of diseases like salmonella (Table 4). Effective rodent control is essential in maintaining a productive and safe poultry farming environment.

Here are comprehensive strategies tailored specifically for poultry farms:

1. Sanitation

Sanitation is often the most crucial and fundamental step in mitigating the risks associated with rodent infestations, especially in poultry farms. Maintaining a high level of cleanliness deprives rodents of the resources they need, namely food and shelter. This involves meticulous management of poultry feed, ensuring it's stored in rodent-proof containers and that any spills are promptly addressed. Additionally, regular disposal of poultry waste is essential, as waste can serve dual purposes for rodents: a food source and a nesting material. By ensuring the consistent cleanliness of equipment, storage rooms, barns, and by making water sources inaccessible to rodents, farms can drastically reduce the appeal for these pests [16].

2. Physical Barriers

Rodent-proofing through physical barriers is a proactive method to prevent these pests from accessing essential areas like poultry houses and feed storage. This involves a thorough examination of the farm's infrastructure to identify and seal any potential entry points like gaps, holes, or cracks using durable materials that rodents can't breach, such as metal or concrete. Installing metal or wire mesh around critical entry points such as doors, vents, and windows is a practical approach to deny access. Another effective strategy is elevating storage materials and feed containers off the ground, making them less accessible to rodents, thereby further securing the premises.

3. Traps and Baits

Implementing traps and baits offers a direct approach to actively reduce and monitor the rodent population within a farm. By strategically placing these tools in high-activity zones—evident from signs like droppings or gnaw marks—farmers can target and capture these pests effectively. Employing a diverse array of trapping methods, including snap traps, glue boards, live traps, and rodenticide baits, ensures a broader coverage catering to different rodent behaviors and species. While these methods are effective, it's paramount to ensure the safety of the poultry, other animals, and humans, especially when using toxic baits. Regular maintenance, including checking and resetting traps and timely removal of captured rodents, ensures the continued efficacy of this strategy.

4. Biological Control

Integrating natural predators into the farm's rodent control strategy can be an eco-friendly and efficient way to manage rodent populations. Predatory birds, such as owls and hawks, can be attracted to the farm by erecting perches, providing a vantage point for these birds to hunt. Additionally, farm cats have been traditional allies in the fight against rodents. While their hunting instincts make them excellent controllers of rodent populations, it's essential to keep them healthy, vaccinated, and separate from the poultry to prevent potential

disease transmission. It's also worth noting that while biological controls offer tangible benefits, care must be taken to ensure that introducing these predators doesn't cause other ecological imbalances or challenges.

5. **Regular Monitoring**

Consistent and regular monitoring forms the backbone of any effective rodent control strategy. By scheduling routine inspections of critical areas on the farm—including feed storage zones, poultry housing, and the farm's perimeter—early signs of rodent activity can be detected and addressed. Keeping an eye out for indicators of rodent presence, such as droppings, gnaw marks, and burrows, is key to gauging the level of infestation. Modern monitoring tools, like motion-activated cameras and UV urine trackers, can provide valuable insights into rodent activity patterns. Engaging and training farm staff to recognize and promptly report signs of rodent activity can further enhance the monitoring process, ensuring a swift and effective response [17].

6. **Feed Management**

i. **Secure Storage:** Ensure that poultry feed is stored in rodent-proof containers or rooms. Metal bins with tight-fitting lids are ideal.

ii. **Clean Feed Spills:** Regularly clean up any spilled feed. Rodents are primarily attracted to farms because of the easily available food.

iii. **Regular Rotation:** Use older feed stocks first to ensure that stocks are rotated, and no feed is left sitting for too long, which can attract rodents.

7. **Structural Repairs and Maintenance**

i. **Seal Entry Points:** Identify and seal any gaps or holes in barns, sheds, and coop structures. Rodents can squeeze through surprisingly small spaces.

ii. **Reinforce Structures:** Consider using metal or wire mesh to reinforce the lower parts of structures, especially in areas that might be vulnerable to gnawing.

8. **Proper Waste Management**

i. **Timely Disposal:** Remove poultry waste regularly. While feed attracts rodents, waste can provide nesting material and cover.

ii. **Composting:** If you're composting waste, ensure it's done properly and is located a good distance from the main poultry housing.

9. **Monitoring and Detection**

i. **Regular Inspections:** Make it a routine to inspect for signs of rodent activity like droppings, tracks, gnawing, or burrows.

ii. **Rodent Detection Devices:** Utilize UV urine trackers and motion-activated cameras in critical areas to monitor nocturnal rodent activities.

10. **Bait Stations and Traps**

i. **Safe Placement:** Position bait stations and traps away from areas accessible to poultry to prevent accidental ingestion or injury.

ii. **Variety of Traps:** Use a combination of snap traps, glue boards, and live catch traps, tailored for the specific rodent species in the area.

iii. **Regular Maintenance:** Check and reset traps frequently, and remove trapped rodents to avoid disease spread.

11. **Habitat Modification**

i. **Limit Shelter:** Keep the farm area free from unnecessary equipment, debris, or stored materials that can provide shelter for rodents.

ii. **Manage Vegetation:** Ensure the farm's perimeter and areas around the structures are free from overgrown vegetation that can provide cover or nesting sites.

12. **Natural Predators**

i. **Encourage Predatory Birds:** Erecting owl or hawk perches can attract these natural predators that can help control rodent populations.

ii. **Farm Cats:** Some farms keep cats as a natural deterrent against rodents. However, ensure cats are healthy and vaccinated to prevent the introduction of other diseases.

13. **Rodenticides**

i. **Safety First:** If using rodenticides, place them in tamper-proof bait stations and away from poultry, other animals, and water sources to prevent contamination.

ii. **Follow Guidelines:** Always adhere to label instructions and local regulations when using chemical controls (Table 5).

CONCLUSION

In our comprehensive study of rodent control strategies in poultry farms, we have underscored the multifaceted nature of effective rodent management. Emphasizing the interplay between sanitation, physical barriers, active interventions like traps and baits, the integration of biological controls, and the pivotal role of consistent monitoring, we recognize that the holistic safeguarding of poultry health and farm investments demands an integrative and

adaptive approach. By adopting these multi-pronged strategies, poultry farmers can not only mitigate the immediate threats posed by rodents but also build a foundation for long-term resilience against potential infestations, thereby ensuring sustainable and safe farming operations.

Figure 1: Persistent problem of rodents in poultry farms (Avi news)

Table 1: Common Diseases Transmitted by Rodents in Poultry Farms

Pathogen	Type	Transmission Mode	Implications for Poultry
Salmonella	Bacteria	Feces, urine, saliva, contaminated feed	Diarrhea, reduced appetite, increased mortality
E. coli	Bacteria	Fecal-oral transmission	Poor growth rates, enteric diseases
Avian Influenza	Virus	Contact with contaminated rodents	Respiratory distress, high mortality rates
Newcastle Disease	Virus	Aerosol and direct contact	Severe respiratory and neurological symptoms
Leptospirosis	Bacteria	Contact with contaminated water or soil	Reduced reproductive performance, liver damage

Table 2: Direct and Indirect Economic Impacts of Rodents on Poultry Farms

Category	Description	Implications
Feed Consumption	Rodents consume stored feed and contaminate remaining supplies.	Economic loss from wasted resources
Structural Damage	Rodents gnaw on materials, wiring, and insulation.	Costly repairs and increased fire hazards
Disease Management	Increased veterinary costs due to pathogen transmission and disease outbreaks.	Higher operational costs
Productivity Loss	Reduced bird health, growth, and egg production.	Lower yield and revenue
Market Reputation	Contaminated products lead to recalls and loss of consumer trust.	Brand damage and loss of market share

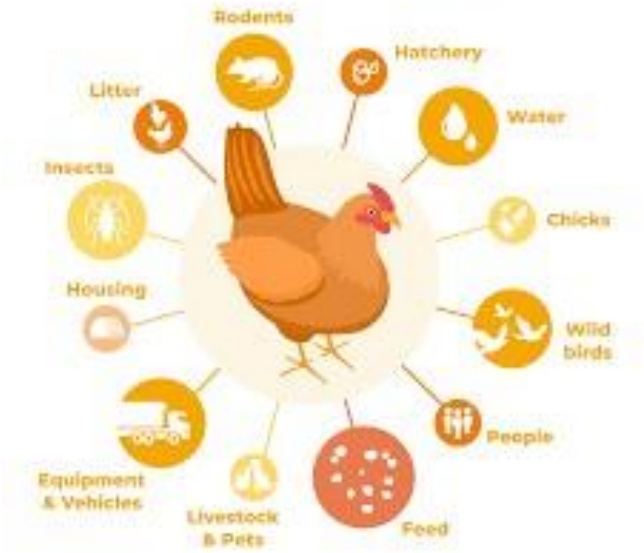

Figure 2: Rodents transmit Salmonella, a widespread problem in poultry farming worldwide (Lohmann information)

Table 3: Implications of Salmonella Contamination in Poultry Farms

Category	Impact on Poultry	Impact on Human Health	Economic Consequences
Poultry Health	Diarrhea, reduced egg production, high mortality	NA	Veterinary and treatment costs
Food Safety	Contaminated eggs and meat	Salmonellosis, severe complications, potential death	Recall costs, decreased consumer confidence
Public Health	NA	Widespread outbreaks, hospitalizations	Legal actions, healthcare costs
Market Impact	Loss of productivity and yield	NA	Export bans, loss of market reputation

Figure 3: Rodents, the enemies of poultry farms (https://www.cobbgenetics.com/en_US/articles/rodents-the-enemy-of-chicken-farms)

Table 4: Rodent Control Strategies in Poultry Farms

Strategy	Description	Benefits
Sanitation	Maintain cleanliness, reduce feed spills, dispose of waste promptly	Removes food and shelter sources for rodents

Physical Barriers	Seal entry points, use metal or mesh screens around vents and doors	Prevents rodent access to feed and poultry areas
Traps and Baits	Place traps and rodenticides in high-activity zones	Reduces rodent population
Biological Control	Use natural predators like cats, owls, and hawks	Eco-friendly pest management
Regular Monitoring	Use visual inspections, cameras, and UV trackers	Early detection and prevention of infestations
Feed Management	Store feed in rodent-proof containers, clean up spills	Limits rodent attraction
Habitat Modification	Remove debris, manage vegetation around the farm	Reduces nesting sites and shelters
Rodenticides	Use tamper-proof bait stations following regulations	Targets and controls rodent populations

Table 5: Recommended Monitoring and Detection Tools for Rodent Control

Tool	Application	Advantages
Motion-Activated Cameras	Monitor nocturnal rodent activities	Real-time tracking and population assessment
UV Urine Trackers	Detect rodent urine trails	Helps pinpoint high-activity zones
Live Traps	Capture and monitor specific rodent species	Allows identification and evaluation of problem
Snap Traps and Glue Boards	Direct removal and monitoring of rodent activity	Quick response to active infestations
LoRaWAN Monitoring Systems	Remote monitoring of rodent populations	Continuous data collection and trend analysis

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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