

Chemical Weapons Enter the War on Wild Hogs.

What everyone should know about Kaput

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Wild hogs have been a problem throughout Mississippi and the Southeast for many years, damaging agriculture, native habitats, native wildlife species, and infrastructure on properties. They also can spread disease to wildlife, humans, livestock, and pets.

Since the early 2000s, the process of developing a wild hog pesticide has been slow and painstaking. Many hours of research, data collection, and testing have been conducted in preparation for the approval of such a tool.

On Jan. 3, 2017, however, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved registration of a wild hog poison called Kaput. EPA registration does not necessarily mean the product will be widely available any time soon. Federal registration is only the first of many steps toward broad-scale use. Each state must decide if and how the product can be used within its borders. As of May 2017, there are no wild hog poisons that can be legally used anywhere in the United States, including Mississippi.

Regardless of legal processes and approval decisions, there is a much more pertinent question that must be asked: What are the possible unintended consequences of putting a toxin-laced bait on the landscape?

So, what is this new poison and how does it work? The active ingredient in Kaput (warfarin) is commonly found in rat poisons

and human “blood thinner” medications. Warfarin interferes with the blood-clotting processes in an animal’s body. After enough of the substance has built up in the bloodstream, the body is no longer able to form clots, which causes extended and progressive bleeding.

If fighting the spread of wild hogs was to be equated to a war, the current tactics we employ lend themselves to scarce collateral damage. That is to say, there is hardly any impact on non-target species. However, the ability to selectively eliminate wild hogs from the landscape could fade significantly if and when a product like Kaput enters the natural environment. Unfortunately, even if used according to label instructions, this product could become accessible to animals such as raccoons, domestic dogs, coyotes, rodents, wild and domestic feline species, white-tailed deer, and, most concerning, black bears.

Although the black bear has recently been removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species, a threat like Kaput has the potential to cause a backslide in that recent progress. Because of its keen sense of smell, brute strength, and dexterity, a black bear would have no problem accessing a feeder with bait like Kaput. Black bears are known to frequent feeders set out by hunters, so a feeder containing Kaput would be no exception.

The label on this product gives specific instructions on its use, but product label instructions too often are ignored. While disregarding the precautions printed on a bottle of glass cleaner might be considered inconsequential, the stakes become much higher when applying a pesticide into an open environment. The improper use of Kaput could threaten not only our native wildlife, but human health as well. While this product contains a low dose of its active ingredient, warfarin (even in low doses) is known cause birth defects in pregnant women. Therefore, consumption of a poisoned wild hog could pose human health risks in some situations.

Lastly, Kaput does not immediately kill its victims. In fact, the label states that the user will not begin to see deceased wild hogs until 4-7 days after consistent feeding and ingestion. This means that hogs may bleed to death over a period of up to 168 hours. Bleeding can also occur in the joints causing an extended period of lameness before the animal’s death. While wild hogs are responsible for untold amounts of damage and destruction in Mississippi, they still deserve a humane and ethical death. As sportsmen, we should always strive to make clean and ethical kills on animals we pursue.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) is dedicated to finding new and effective tools to control wild hog populations throughout our state. One of these tools might one day include a poison that can be safely and ethically placed on the landscape. However, the concerns brought about by this product (Kaput) are too grave to overlook. Therefore, the MDWFP does not endorse and will not use this product. As stewards of the lands of Mississippi, we must always strive to make decisions based on their overall impact to the natural environment.

As the great naturalist Aldo Leopold once said “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

