

## **State of Ohio Pest Hunt Champion**

As a North West Ohio farm boy, I was, (along with all aspiring young farmers) quite aware of the problems indigenous pests caused to crops and structures, so it was only natural that our Future Farmers of America (FFA) Club at The Academy would embrace the annual State of Ohio Pest Hunt Contest. Rats and mice were a special nuisance to stored grain and small nuisance birds (sparrows, starlings and pigeons) were always enjoying their meals in area corn cribs and wheat and oat bins at the farmers' expense. The annual state-wide pest hunt was one effort to reduce these annoying creatures. Raccoons, muskrats and chipmunks were also on the list of unwanted pests but didn't seem to cause the problems that rats and mice did. As an added incentive, The State of Ohio offered a several hundred dollar award to the FFA Club that caught the most pests during the designated time period.

My buddies, Jim Warren, Jim Steyer and Bob Good and I decided to team up and do our best to help our local FFA Chapter. The contest was held each Fall and although we all played football on the Academy team and had farm chores to do each evening, we decided we could spare one night each week for month or two to rid our community of these unwanted visitors. Spending one night a week hunting pests might seem like a large time commitment along with football practices, farm chores and homework, but then again, farm boys didn't have much of

life until they discovered girls...and that hadn't happened to us yet.

## **The Plan**

The plan was for whoever could get the car for the evening would line up several nearby neighbors who would permit us to crawl around in their barns to find and kill sparrows, starlings and pigeons. The way one does this is to position one's self at the inside peaks of the barn roof near the window exit, usually with their legs wrapped around the vertical ladder which rises to a small loft which served as a repair station for the pulleys used to haul hay into the hay lofts. This location was usually 15-30 feet above the bales of hay or in some cases, loose piles of hay. Falling to the loose hay could be fun, but falling onto stacks of baled hay could be quite problematic so we tried, as teenage boys attempt to do, to be careful. When in position, someone would throw an empty bucket against one of the large beams supporting the roof and sparrows and starlings and pigeons would attempt to flee the barn through the windows at each end. That is when the fun began...birds of all sizes and shapes flying into your faces and chests...and each of us attempting to catch and decapitate a pest, placing the head in a bag we had tied around our necks (We never considered what might happen if we lost our balance and the bag might get caught on a ladder rung as we fell...that is what I meant by being safe like a teenager!) With each throw of the bucket, we would each catch and "perform hand surgery" on several birds, placing the severed head in our bags. After an hour or two of this, we would collect the

carcasses and count our catch for the evening which had to be counted the next day by our FFA Instructor, who would then incinerate the bounty.

The contest award chart indicated that we would receive:

Sparrow.....	1 Point
Starling.....	5 Points
Pigeon.....	10 Points
Mice.....	10 Points
Rats.....	25 Points

In one evening, we might catch 15 starlings (We didn't bother with 1 point sparrows) and 10 pigeons (75 points + 100 Points). That was lots of work, and danger, for 175 points. **It soon became apparent that if we were to win a prize we would have to go for rats!!**

### **The Next Move**

My neighbor, Mr. Feters, had a large pig farm and it is common knowledge among farmers that rats like to hang out around pig coops, as pigs are sloppy in general, but are profoundly sloppy when they eat. I approached Mr. Feters and asked if we might come to his place after school and lie in wait for rats who had staked a claim on the space under the pigs coops. My suggested plan: We would place some bait outside the pens, then hide nearby...when the rats came to dine, we would shoot them with our 22 caliber rifles. Mr. Feters said that we could not do that as we might accidentally shoot one of his valuable pigs, but that he had another idea. It seems that four or five years before, other FFA Pest Hunters had the

same brilliant idea as us and were turned away by Mr. Fetters. He said he felt bad that he could not help them but anticipating another request, had been saving the tails of all the rats he had killed in gallon jugs of brine. He asked me to follow him into the barn to see the trove of rat tails. I was shocked! He had collected five gallon jugs of rat tails!!! Not a pretty sight for some of my readers, but a glorious moment for Glenn, the Pest Stalker!

### **The Outcome**

The next morning, I hauled my rat tail jugs into the furnace room of The Academy (Where pests were counted and incinerated! I'll bet the EPA would issue a finding to schools using their furnaces to incinerate pests!) My instructor said that since I did not actually kill these pests, he would have to seek guidance from the state office regarding whether-or-not they could be counted for contest purposes. He called the state office and the ruling was they could be counted if caught in our county and not used for any other contest. Yeah! We broke the jugs in a portable coal bin and counted and counted! I had several thousand points...enough for our Chapter to not only win the state contest, but for me to win the individual title...Pest Hunt Champion. My FFA Chapter received a check for several hundred dollars and I received a letter stating that I won the individual award. My team and I were state champions! I had received the coveted PhC!

### **Finally**

Over the years, I probably have not received the acclaim one might expect for winning a state championship...there

have been no endorsements (“I always use dCon.”); no public acclaim (“I’d like to introduce our State of Ohio Pest Hunt Champion...”); no financial rewards (The Club got all the prize money.); and even my family rarely mention it (When I mentioned I was writing this story, Ruth said, “I didn’t remember that you won that.”). I would just like to say that if you want to impress your grandchildren, write a rock song or play in the NFL...holding your little grandson on your lap and saying “I was the State of Ohio Pest Hunt Champion” hardly raises an eyebrow...but deep down in I know that what I did, or what Mr. Fetters and I did, made Hancock County a healthier and better place to live. Altruism may not attract the attention of the masses but it is good for the soul. I can sleep easier at night knowing what I did was in the best interest of others.

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Note: I received my PhC before my PhD. I am proud of both.