

# IMPACT



Franklin County Extension, 561 West Oneida, Preston, ID 83263; Phone: 208-852-1097, Fax: 208-852-2812

## Bugs Don't "Bug" Mink Rancher Any More

### *The Situation*

Franklin County mink producers have long faced a running battle with larder beetles. The furbearers' high-protein diet draws the bugs to the sheds housing the mink cages. The beetles become a problem when they burrow into and weaken the wood supports for the cages and the sheds. Mink producers faced the choice of either using expensive insecticides to control the beetles or making expensive repairs.

Jeff Hobbs has been involved in mink ranching for his entire life. To control larder beetles, he spent approximately \$500 per year on insecticides.

### *Our Response*

The Franklin County Extension Office sponsored a workshop in January 2001 that helped Jeff Hobbs develop an innovative larder beetle control program. The workshop, "*Growing Ideas for Farm and Home-Based Businesses*," included a presentation about the benefits of raising pastured poultry. One benefit cited was a decrease in insects around the farm.

Jeff left the meeting with an idea for adapting the chicken/insect control idea to his mink ranch. That spring Jeff purchased 50 baby chicks, raised them to a size where they would be able to take care of

themselves and set them loose around the inside and outside of the mink pen buildings.

### *Program Outcomes*

The chickens have not only brought the larder beetle populations under control, but they have also kept many other insects at an acceptable level.



It is now difficult to even find a larder beetle anywhere around the buildings. Jeff has not had to spend any money on larder beetle sprays this year. Jeff says, "My investment of \$100 in chicks and starter feed has resulted in a \$500 savings in insecticide purchases."

Jeff has had small losses of his chickens to predators, and even to his mink. Losses occurred mostly when the chickens were young. The chickens have since adapted to the environment and surroundings. They learned quickly to stay clear of the wire pens and avoid the jaws of the chicken loving-mink. Some chickens have lost a toe or two from walking on the mink pens. Jeff still occasionally sees a chicken hop up on top of the pens and then run from one end of the building to another without stopping. They have learned not to dangle a toe in the pen.

### **The Future**

The only problem with this insect control system is the chickens haven't been very good at controlling fly larvae, so flies continue to be a problem. Jeff is now considering other bird or predator insect species to get better fly larvae control.

### ***For More Information***

Stuart Parkinson

Extension Educator

Franklin County Extension Office

561 West Oneida

Preston, ID 83263

Phone: 208-852-1097

Fax: 208-852-2812

Email: [stuartp@uidaho.edu](mailto:stuartp@uidaho.edu)

02parkinson-bugs.doc  
2002