



SOUTH

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QofM

Question of the Month



What Can States Do About Feral Swine?

Across the South, there's a feral swine problem. These not-so-little piggies are crying "wee wee wee" throughout every Southern state and they're going hog wild. So, what can states do about these insu-"boar"-dinate pests?

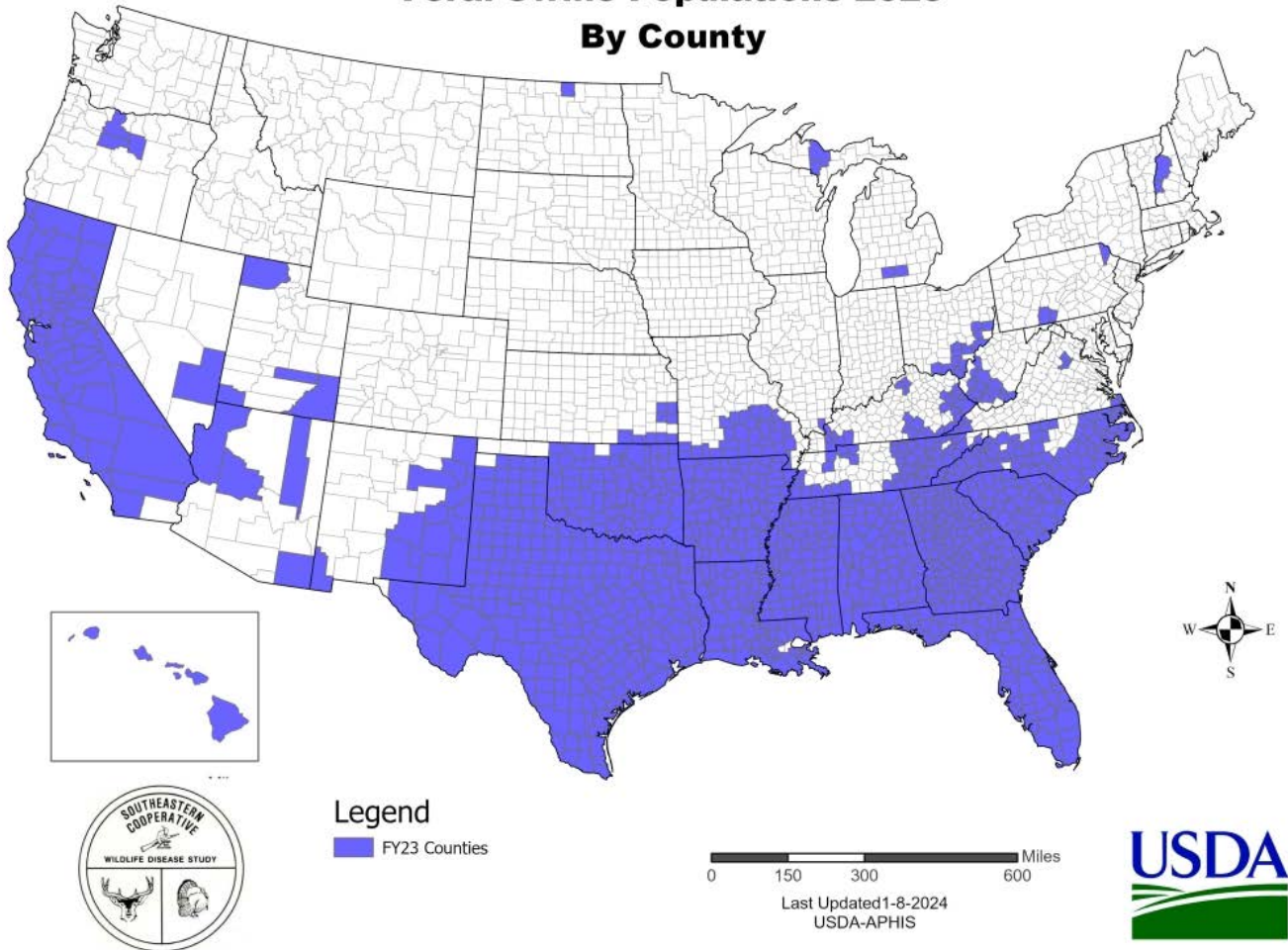
Wild hogs are the [most prolific large mammals](#) in North America. With adequate nutrition, populations can double in four months. In terms of destruction, the United States Department of Agriculture [estimates](#) that feral swine cause \$2.5 billion worth of damage each year.

What makes wild hogs such a problem is that they consume crops and [reduce the populations of other wildlife](#), such as turkeys. They can also pose a risk to humans; feral swine can be [linked to certain diseases](#) harmful to humans, such as brucellosis and pseudorabies.

And it is not just rural areas dealing with this issue either; officials from the University of Arkansas and the state's Department of Agriculture's Feral Hog Eradication Task Force [point to](#) states neighboring the Natural State with wild hogs roaming city streets and warn that they will soon become an issue in metropolitan areas in Arkansas. In Florida, Tampa Bay residents have even [reported](#) feral swine in suburban backyards.



Feral Swine Populations 2023 By County



Source: [USDA](#)

Generally, states' approaches to dealing with these vermin focus on four main areas:

1. Game law classifications (with most removing feral swine from any specific classification to allow year-round hunting);
2. Hunting regulations to either enable or restrict sport-hunting on public and private land;
3. Transportation provisions on live transport and import;
4. Private industry and landowner regulations such as commercial outfitting and landowners' prerogative to sell wild pig hunts and profit from their harvest.

Some states, like [Arkansas](#) and [Texas](#), are working with the federal government by partnering with the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services (APHIS) to conduct operations aimed at reducing feral swine populations, especially in Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and state and national parks.

In South Carolina, researchers from the University of Georgia [studied](#) the effectiveness of a USDA APHIS's program to control feral

swine populations near Aiken, South Carolina, over a 24-month period. The program mainly utilized traps (corral traps, drop traps, and net traps baited with whole corn), and captured pigs were euthanized. Ground and night shooting was also used as a control method and aerial hunting on one property. The study showed that the control efforts reduced the feral swine populations by nearly 70 percent within 12 to 24 months, and that environmental rooting damage decreased by 99 percent within 24 months.

Other Southern states have created districts within their borders to handle the growth of feral swine populations in multiple counties.

Georgia:

In [Georgia](#), for example, the Georgia Associations of Conservation Districts (GACD) Feral Swine Committee was created in 2017 to oversee 20 districts throughout the state. The Committee estimates that its efforts have saved landowners \$5.5 million in property damage. The Committee also leads initiatives for trap leases.

Louisiana:

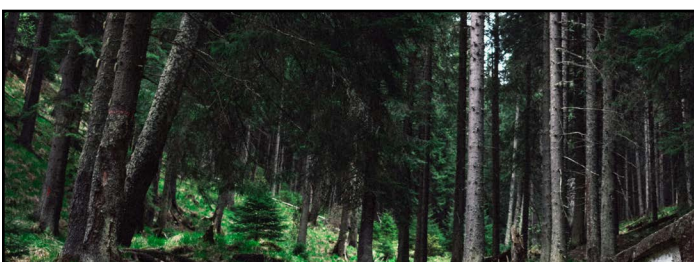
In [Louisiana](#), the state was granted \$1.3 million for programs from the 2018 Farm Bill to slow the feral swine populations in certain parishes. Louisiana's program mainly focused on traps set using corn coated with a strawberry scent. Once several pigs were inside, the trap's gates were shut to secure to them and, from there, the landowner was responsible for discarding the hogs either on the property or through a pre-arranged contractor.

Missouri:

[Missouri](#) also funded programs from the 2018 Farm Bill under the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership, which comprises more than 15 federal and state entities. The Partnership has 48 elimination specialists in the state who mainly focus on forests and watershed areas. Since 2016, the Partnership has reduced feral swine near watersheds by nearly 65 percent. In 2022, it removed 6,289 hogs.

On the individual level, hunting wild hogs can be a recreational sport with some hunters even taking to the skies to seek out feral swine.

Recreational aerial hog hunting is normally done via helicopter, and many private companies facilitate aerial hog hunts on lands where it is permitted. However, [there are issues](#) with feral swine adapting to aerial hunts, especially with recreational/private operators, as the pigs tend to learn to act evasively at the sound of helicopters, making them even harder to contain.



As with many animals, guidelines on hunting wild boar have been set by all 15 Southern states.

** Notably, only Missouri does not allow feral swine hunting.*

State	Regulation
Alabama	There is no closed season and no bag limit. Hunting is year-round on private land. A hunting license is required in Wildlife Management Areas (WMA).
Arkansas	Hunting on private land is legal year-round. Hunting on public land is also year-round, excluding certain WMAs. Night hunting is permitted on private land.
Florida	Wild hogs can be hunted year-round with permission from the landowner. No license or permit is required. There is no bag or size limit, and night hunting is legal. Hunting on WMAs is allowed except during turkey season.
Georgia	There is no limit and no closed season. Night hunting is allowed on private land only.
Kentucky	Wild boars are legal to hunt year-round. There is no bag limit except at the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area. Night hunting is illegal.
Louisiana	Hunting wild hogs is open year-round during shooting hours. Night hunting is allowed on private property.
Mississippi	There is no bag limit, hunting is permitted on owners' property year-round, designated hunting is allowed year-round with permission from landowners, and boars can be "accidentally" killed during hunting season on public land. Night hunting is permitted on private land.
Missouri	Feral swine hunting is not allowed.
North Carolina	There are no closed seasons, no bag limit, and night hunting is allowed on private land.
Oklahoma	Night hunting is allowed on private land with permission, year-round. Hunting on public land is from mid-January to the end of September.
South Carolina	There is no closed season with a license. Night hunting is allowed.
Tennessee	Allowed on private land year-round, no bag limit and night shooting is allowed. On public land, boars can be killed in regard to certain regions, with a license.
Texas	No hunting license is required to hunt feral hogs on private property with landowner authorization. Night hunting is allowed.
Virginia	Open season, no bag limit, night hunting is allowed with a license
West Virginia	Allowed on private land without a license, on public land with a license; night hunting is not permitted.

Source: [Wild Boar Hunting State Laws](#)

Interestingly, [academic research](#) suggests that states with more prohibitive policies (i.e. restricting sport-hunting, importation, live-hog transportation, hunting preserves - including those with high fences - and forbidding landowners from charging fees to hunt wild hogs) have lower rates of feral swine populations. Researchers also noted that, while feral swine hunting is often socially accepted and even seen as a conventional pastime, areas with these norms had higher distributions and greater rates of expansion of feral swine.



In Kentucky, the Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources appears to agree. In 2023, it [stated](#), "A prohibition on the hunting of wild pigs in Kentucky would enhance [the Department's strategy in partnership with USDA APHIS] by reducing the occurrence of new wild pig releases and facilitating a more systematic application of proven-effective eradication methods where wild pigs occur in the Commonwealth."

A more results-based approach is currently underway at Louisiana State University. There, researchers have [developed](#) and patented a bait containing sodium nitrite, which is lethal to feral swine but should have a minimal impact on the environment and non-target species. The bait has a gelatin-like texture, is roughly the size of a golf ball, and glows under blacklight. Hogs that consume the bait usually die within three

hours. In addition, the sodium nitrite used in the bait breaks down enough so that affected swine carcasses do not harm other species. The researchers are now working on a delivery system (e.g. burying the bait or remotely releasing it from feeders) before it can be approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and released for commercial use.

Aside from LSU's bait, other products like [HogStop](#) are commercially available and aim to stop the spread of feral swine by suppressing fertility. However, this approach has been [met with skepticism](#) because, while sows (female pigs) and young hogs can stay in an area long enough to consume enough to become sterile, boars (male pigs) are more likely to roam and not be as affected. Therefore, these boars will likely continue to find new sows with which to breed.

States are, therefore, left with only a few options to stop the spread of feral swine outright. As research points out, recreational hunting appears to make the problem worse, not better. Until bait like the one created at LSU is widely available, creating state-wide programs to coordinate the response to these vermin or to place guardrails on the permissions for hunting feral swine appear to be the best options.

