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LARGE AREA CLEARED OF
PRAIRIE DOGS AND SQUIRRELS

Uncle Sam, taking stock of work done during the past fiscal year in ridding the Nation's ranges and farm lands of the prairie dog and the ground squirrel - twin pests that strip productive fields of vegetation and make fertile lands barren for periods of years - finds that during the 12 months 18,331,861 acres of land has been baited with poison and pretty well freed of the rogues. This great stretch of land, distributed among 16 States, is approximately equal in area to half of the State of Iowa.

Through this branch of the Government's activity, it is estimated the farmers of the country were afforded a saving during the year of more than \$11,000,000. Since the work was undertaken on a large scale in 1916, a total of 7,714,518 acres of Federal land and 70,113,271 acres of State and private land have been treated with poison baits under the supervision of the Government, and largely cleared of the troublesome rodents. The estimated value of crops and range grasses saved during the 5 years is placed at \$54,000,000.

Poisoning prairie dogs and ground squirrels is one of the activities of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. These little pests, difficult of approach and wary of man, infest many millions of acres of range and agricultural lands. They select the most productive valleys and bench lands for their depredations. If left undisturbed they destroy valuable forage grasses, including their roots, and often leave what once were fertile fields a barren waste, punctured with many holes, and with only a few scattering clumps of weeds and wire grass remaining of their former vegetation. They may reduce the stock-carrying capacity of the lands they attack to zero.

Where prairie dogs attack a crop nothing is left to harvest. Corn, wheat, oats, rye, barley, and alfalfa are among the valuable grain and hay crops of the country which prairie dogs, ground squirrels, pocket gophers,

jack rabbits, and similar rodent pests destroy to the extent of \$150,000,000 annually and reduce the carrying capacity of the pasture ranges by an equal amount. With their ally, the rat, and other small rodents, it is estimated that the economic loss due to their combined activities approximates \$500,000,000 a year.

To check the prairie dog and the ground squirrel, organized campaigns were conducted during the past fiscal year in 16 States, namely, Arizona, California, Colorado, the Dakotas, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The only practical way of disposing of these animals is to poison them. The poisoned bait consists of oats, of which the pests are fond, strychnine, saccharine (to make the poison more palatable), and other ingredients.

The bait is spread over the "towns," whose only inhabitants are the prairie dogs, ground squirrels, and other pests living with them. The 18,331,861 acres cited above were so treated during the year, and in addition follow-up work was done on 4,403,662 acres. This follow-up work was necessitated in some cases by the rain beating the oats into the ground, where they lay unnoticed by the rodents, and was in all cases done to make the first treatment fully effective.

Assisting the Federal Government in this work through cooperative funds were States and counties and many landowners. Their contributions during the year amounted to \$725,000. Poisoned grain prepared and distributed under the supervision of the department amounted to 1,235 tons, equivalent to a solid train load of more than 30 cars, while 104,523 farmers and stockman took enthusiastic part in the organized work. The department had in the field 28 men whose duty it was to demonstrate to State, county, and private agencies the most effective way of doing the work.

So successful has been the department's effort to eradicate the pest, that large areas of national forest lands treated for the eradication of prairie dogs now afford grazing to 10 per cent more cattle and sheep than before the treatment. Stockmen who range their stock upon national forests where prairie dogs and ground squirrels used to abound but have been destroyed are greatly pleased by the increased pasturage thus afforded, as well as by the fact that the work prevents their private land holdings, once cleared of the pest, from being constantly reinfested by animals from adjacent Government lands.

The prairie dog is a sociable little pest, and seldom lives alone. Its towns are well populated. As an instance, there may be cited an area of 31,680 acres treated with poison recently at the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. The average number of holes per acre found by the Government workers was 47. In treating this land the workers used more than 5 tons of grain, 440 ounces of strychnine, and 60 ounces of saccharine. The baits they laid were small, averaging about 70 to the quart, and their effectiveness is shown by the fact that approximately 98 per cent of the animals were killed.

The cost was $11\frac{1}{2}$ cents per acre.