Responsible rodenticide use is a requirement in GLAS

A series of thirteen pilot training courses for farmers accepted into the GLAS scheme under Tranches 1 and 2 ran throughout the month of February. These pilot training courses were organized by Teagasc and were held in venues around the country. A maximum of twenty farmers attended each course which lasted for six hours and included both an indoor and an outdoor module. Each course provided instruction on the requirements of the GLAS scheme and practical information and demonstrations on many of the twenty - five actions listed therein.

One of the requirements of the GLAS scheme is that participants should comply with the **Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU)** in their daily farming activities. The seven steps of the CRRU Code forms part of each GLAS Training Course as does familiarization with approved bait box types (if there is a requirement to use rodenticides on the farm).

The most common pesticides used for rodent control are Second Generation Anti-Coagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) which are highly toxic substances. Only those products that are registered with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) may be used. Instructions for use on product labels are legally binding and must be complied with. SGARs are highly persistent in the environment and can affect predators higher up the food chain that feed on rodents who may have taken these poisons. Recent research by Birdwatch Ireland has revealed that 85% of Barn Owls in Ireland have traces of rodenticides in their bodies, and whilst the levels detected may be sub-lethal, it is still a matter of concern. It is likely that other birds of prey such as Red Kite, Kestrel and Buzzards that feed on rodents are also contaminated with residues of these rodenticides.

The responsible use of rodenticides can greatly reduce incidences of unintended poisoning of wildlife, and this is what the CRRU code emphasizes. It should form part of the Integrated Pest Management plan which each farmer should have for their farm.

The seven steps of the CRRU code are covered in some detail on the GLAS Training Course. In brief they are as follows;

1. Always have a planned approach
2. Always record quantity of bait used and where it is placed
3. Always use enough baiting points
4. Always collect and dispose of rodent bodies
5. Never leave bait exposed to non-target animals and birds
6. Never fail to inspect bait regularly
7. Never leave bait down at the end of treatment

Some farmers may feel that leaving out poisoned bait on a permanent basis is necessary, but this is illegal and unnecessarily exposes non-target wildlife to risk of poisoning, e.g. small mammals such as pygmy shrews and field mice, bank voles and white-toothed shrews in the south and west of the country. Bait can also be taken by molluscs such as slugs, and in this way accumulate in the bodies of birds that feed on them, which in turn is further concentrated in birds of prey such as sparrow hawks and peregrine falcons. While such secondary poisoning is unintentional on the part of the farmer, abiding by the CRRU code greatly reduces the likelihood of it happening.

An integrated rodent pest management programme, involving proofing of buildings to prevent rodent access, restricting access to food and water, control of infestations that occur, removal of harborage, and monitoring using non-toxic or placebo baits should be adopted on farms.

In developing the training course, Teagasc consulted with CRRU Ireland which provided training materials on the responsible control of rodent pests used in the course, and CRUU Taskforce members participated in the training provided. Following the evaluation of these initial thirteen courses, a GLAS Training Day will be rolled out later in 2016 for all farmers in Tranches 1 and 2 of GLAS. It is a requirement of the GLAS scheme that each applicant must attend such a course. Successful implementation of GLAS over the five-year period from 2016 -2021 should lead to a welcome improvement in Ireland's biodiversity.

Further information on CRRU can be obtained from the CRRU Ireland website www.crru.ie.