Between 2000 and 2010, feral hogs expanded their range to include at least 74 of 77 Oklahoma counties and 235 of 254 Texas counties. They are present in all 47 counties of the Noble Foundation service area. This wide distribution has led to increased human and feral hog contact which often results in increased conflict. If feral hogs have a redeeming quality, it might be that they provide some additional recreational hunting opportunities. If cared for properly, their meat can make tasty table fare. However, potential problems associated with feral hogs are numerous, including difficulty controlling population numbers, disease transmission, property damage and competition for resources with native wildlife.

In many areas, feral hog populations are present in epidemic proportions, and the need for control is imminent. Numerous trap designs have been used to capture them; however, drop-nets have never been examined as a potential tool for feral hog control. We have used drop-nets to capture deer for more than 25 years. In the mid-1990s, we began using drop-nets to capture feral hogs that were interfering with our white-tailed deer capture efforts. The technique was successful enough to warrant further examination.

We implemented a two-year study to compare the effectiveness and efficiency of a 60 foot by 60 foot drop-net and a traditional corral trap for trapping feral hogs. In 2010, treatment units and multiple trap sites were identified on 10,000 acres in Love County, Okla. Trap sites were
baited with whole corn and monitored with infrared-triggered cameras during pre-baiting, pre-trap construction and capture periods. During the first year (2010), we trapped 222 hogs between Jan. 25 and April 28.

We documented maximum captures of 27 and 15 in drop-nets and corral traps, respectively. Preliminary findings indicate that 93 percent and 55 percent of the hog populations were removed from the study sites using drop-nets and corral traps, respectively. Catch per unit effort was 1.9 and 2.4 hours per hog for drop-nets and corral traps, respectively. Preliminary data indicate drop-nets are an effective tool for capturing feral hogs. Advantages of using drop-nets include reduced trap shyness and the ability to capture large numbers, sometimes entire sounders, in a single drop. Capturing an entire sounder likely reduces instances of hogs becoming educated to the trap and therefore reduces wariness around trap sites. Non-target captures are also eliminated when using drop-nets for hog capture.

Keep in mind, we are in no way suggesting drop-nets are “the only way” to capture feral hogs. Data from the first year of the study suggests, however, that drop-nets deserve consideration for inclusion in the arsenal of weapons to fight the feral hog epidemic.