

## Rat Hunter Provides Needed Service In California

Jordan Reed gives his terriers an opportunity to do what they're inclined to do anyway - hunt and kill rats. He provides a needed service around Sonoma and nearby counties in northern California.

Through word of mouth and recent media attention, "Reed and his Mongrol Hoard" have found plenty of demand for their services over the past 5 years. For about \$75 (and a case of beer) Reed and his dogs spend 3 or 4 hours diminishing rat problems for mostly small farmers with chickens, organic crops or composting facilities.

Concerns about rats are real, Reed says, noting they destroy feed, chew wiring and defecate in living spaces, spread diseases, steal eggs and kill chicks and other small animals. Rats thrive in California's warm climate, but many producers can't or don't want to use poison.

Using dogs is more natural and fast, but not something everyone can do.

Reed, a South Carolina native, loves to hunt and says rat hunting gives him an opportunity to let his dogs off their leashes to do what they love to do.

His rat hunting business evolved after a terrier he owned killed rats that were after Reed's chickens. Reed started encouraging other dogs to do the same.

"We do a lot of training with puppies," Reed says. "We let them play with dead rats and bring them on hunts, but we don't allow young dogs to try to kill because they can get hurt."

The terriers are socialized with chickens, cats and other dogs so they aren't in hunting

mode when they meet them.

"Never get more than one dog at a time to train," Reed says, adding that a trained dog greatly helps training a new dog.

While the dogs are good hunters, they need human help to choreograph where they go. When Reed is hired, he requests the customer provide a couple of adults or teens to help. If they can't, he brings a couple of friends along for an extra fee.

"I follow the lead of one adult dog. I'm like the ringmaster," Reed says, directing dogs. "I have experience to see how much food is available and how many rats there might be." He also knows where they're hiding - under pallets and bales, and in double walls, for example.

On average he and his dogs find and kill 20 to 30 rats on a hunt at a small farm. Reed's record was 121 rats at a compost facility, where owners thought it was rat-proof.

No place is rat-proof, Reed says, and he turns clients down who have filthy farms and poor animal husbandry practices or refuse to clean up their property and make necessary improvements - build coops 18 in. off the ground, eliminate double walls, store food in metal cans overnight, and don't store kitchen compost near housing, for example.

Norway rats also live in tunnels and can hold their breath a long time so drowning doesn't usually work. Exhaust from a chainsaw or vehicle is more effective to show where tunnels go. Then the strategy comes down to blocking exits and digging with a shovel.

Reed says property owners can use other



Jordan Reed trains terrier dogs to hunt and kill rats around northern California. On average, he and his dogs kill 20 to 30 rats on a hunt at a small farm.

breeds of working farm dogs to control rats on their own property.

"If you're looking for a rodent dog, get a terrier from a farm where its parents' behavior is observable. Mixed breeds and pound dogs are good at this too," he explains. "You have to be interested in it yourself. You have to actively take a part in going after the rats on your farm - and your dog must be interested in following along."

Reed emphasizes that he does not breed or sell dogs. He sells services through word of mouth, Craig's List and by clients messaging

him through his Facebook page.

Rat hunting is not for everyone, Reed admits and it's hard work - shoveling, moving things and keeping track of as many as 12 dogs at a time when he is working with others. But it's rewarding to see his dogs at work and enjoying it - and to hear from grateful customers such as the chicken owner who reported an increase in eggs after Reed and his dogs eliminated rats from her farm.

Contact Jordon through Facebook. Search: Jreed and his Mongrol Hoard

## Iowa Farmer Raises Fish In Converted Hog Building

In 2010 Iowa hog producer Mark Nelson attended the Iowa Pork Congress and was intrigued with a product that had nothing to do with hogs. What caught his eye was a display by CableVey Conveyors, a company that installs feed systems in a variety of agricultural systems. The company showed a picture of the CableVey system being used above commercial grade fish tanks.

When Nelson returned home he shared his idea about converting a hog building to aquaculture with Jeff Nelson, his cousin and business partner. The cousins had an empty 60 by 220-ft. hog confinement building sitting unused that could be used for fish. The Nelsons traveled to several fish farms around the country. Within 2 years they converted their empty hog barn into an aquaculture facility that now holds 72 recirculating nursery tanks and eighteen 10,000-gal. grow-out tanks. The Nelsons named their business Iowa's First, since it was the first aquaculture farm in the state.

To build their facility the cousins teamed up with Rick Sheriff to design a patented system for their farm. Sheriff, an aquaculture veteran, engineered a tank system that uses what they call "opposing flows technology". This recirculating system uses 40 hp motors to oxygenate the fish tanks. Air diffusers along the bottom of the tanks create 2 opposing flows of water, which causes the fish to constantly swim against the current to better metabolize their high protein feed.

When the Nelsons started production in

2012 they raised hybrid striped bass, which turned out to be a high maintenance species. In 2014 they began producing barramundi, which is popular in Asia and Australia and is gaining interest in the United States. Mark Nelson says barramundi is known for its firm, white, and succulent flesh. It has a moist, fine-grained texture and mild flavor. It's an extremely nutritious fish that's low in fat and high in protein.

One barramundi fillet provides the same Omega-3 content as approximately 17 steaks, making it very heart healthy. Nelson says barramundi are prolific at reproduction, with a single female producing 3 to 6 million eggs at spawning. This allows large-scale reproduction with minimal brood stock. Barramundi also have a 1:1 feed conversion rate and produce fillet yields up to 50 percent of their body weight. Iowa's First receives a shipment of baby fingerlings fish from an Australian company each month.

The Nelsons say they're happy with their opposing flows tank model because it eliminates the risks found in most outdoor fish farms. Iowa's First indoor fish production system doesn't have to deal with groundwater contamination, accidental chemical overspray, or severe weather. Their fish are also less prone to disease and they grow faster in a controlled environment.

The Nelsons are able to raise barramundi to their 2 to 2.2-lb. market weight in 6 mo. Iowa's First currently has 18 grow-out tanks and 72 nursery tanks.

According to Mark Nelson, fish farming



In 2012 Mark and Jeff Nelson converted an empty 60 by 220-ft. hog confinement building to raise fish. It now holds 72 recirculating nursery tanks and eighteen 10,000-gal. grow-out tanks.



Recirculating system uses 40 hp motors to oxygenate the fish tanks. Air diffusers along bottom of tanks create 2 opposing flows of water.



is similar to raising hogs because they have chores every day such as monitoring water temperature, oxygen levels, feeding the fish and moving them from tank to tank as they grow. They purchase special pelletized feed that floats on the surface of the tanks. They never use antibiotics or growth stimulants to increase productivity. They also keep a mobile generator available if power is interrupted, because the fish wouldn't survive more than 15 min. without oxygenated water.

Managing day-to-day operations in the family-run business are Mark's son-in-law, Matt Clarken, Mark's daughter, Grace Nelson, and Jeff's son, Brent Nelson. The entire

Nelson family is passionate about raising home-grown fish and seafood in America's heartland. With more consumers wanting food that's grown locally, the Nelsons say raising fish has good profit potential, too. The Nelson's operation will grow in the next two years through a network of partner growers and a larger hub facility planned for Webster City, Iowa.

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