Pocket Gopher Control with MECHANICAL BURROW BUILDER MACHINE

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Pocket gophers are seldom seen, since almost their entire time is spent underground. One pocket gopher to a runway is the rule, except in breeding season, or when young are being cared for.

The food of gophers consists mostly of roots of various plants, such as dandelion, alfalfa, grasses and trees. They regularly eat most tubers, and such green tops and available seeds as can be pulled down into the tunnels through root holes.

Dirt from runways is pushed to the surface to form characteristic circular mounds 8 to 18 or more inches in diameter. Mounds are at the ends of short lateral tunnels branched off the main runway. The surface opening through which dirt is pushed from the tunnel is finally plugged by pushing dirt into it, leaving a small horseshoe-like depression on one side of the mound.

Pocket gophers dig extensive tunnels or runways, up to 800 feet long and covering as much as an acre of ground. Burrows vary with the species from 2 to 4 or 5 inches in diameter. The runways serve as homes, storehouses and routes for underground hunting of food. The foraging tunnels may be from 4 to 8 inches below the surface. Food supplies and nests frequently are several feet deep.

Control

Pocket gophers can be controlled by several methods. Previous to the mechanical burrow builder, trapping and placement of poison bait into tunnels were the methods used.

Previous pocket gopher control techniques required hard manual labor. The operator had to probe for underground runways and place bait, all by hand. The burrow builder offers a mechanized method by which the operator constructs and baits an artificial gopher runway in one operation. This method allows the gopher to find the bait material.

Burrow Builder

Since the first mechanical burrow builder (a 3-point hitch machine), the principle now has been adapted to a 3-point hitch, 2-point hitch and 2-wheel plow-type machine. Available with this circular are plans for the 3-point hitch and 2-wheel plow-type machines. Most of the machines can be built from used machinery at low cost.

The machine consists of a corn-planter type feed mechanism with two rubber-tired wheelbarrow wheels as packer and power for feeding mechanism, coulter wheel and steel used to make frame, subsoiler, and torpedo. Readymade parts for a 3-point hitch may be purchased. The parts are similar to a Ford 32 inch by 4 inch by 4 inch model 108-1 tool carrier bar with one 24-inch subsoiler, subsoiler Shank less chisel and boot, one corn planter can with standard bottom, one large whole center drop plate, equipped with one press wheel drive assembly less press wheel; and two wheel assemblies, including axles, spacers, cup, and two 4 inch by 8 inch tires and tubes.

The burrow builder can be used for control of gophers in any area where soil conditions and the physical condition of the land make it possible to drive over the area with a tractor and construct a good artificial burrow.

The condition of the soil has to be such that a good burrow can be made. This usually requires enough moisture in the soil to make it form into a pack when squeezed in the hand. In North Dakota, this condition usually can be found in the spring or fall of the year.
CONSTRUCTION NOTES

1. The planter box assembly may be a common standard unit so long as the seed plate and plate speed can be adjusted to deliver 2-4 pounds of grain per 1,000 feet of burrow. Press wheels should be modified as shown in the drawings.

2. Grease fittings should be provided to lubricate the following points: Planter box feed shaft bearings, press wheel axle bearings, and coulter axle bearings.

3. The shear bolts which attach the hitch yoke to the top of the sub-coulters are designed to protect the machine against damage caused by striking solid obstructions.

4. The torpedo which forms the burrow should be hard surfaced to resist wear on the front end, which is sloped at a 60 degree angle. The leading edge of the sub-coulter shank and the top of the rear end of the torpedo should also be hard surfaced for longer wear.
CONSTRUCTION

1. Any two beams, either 14" or 16", pull type plow can be used to build this pull type pocket gopher burrow builder. Note both beams are cut off at the point of where the beams start to curve. The plow needs very little further alteration except mounting the burrow building unit.

2. Before cutting off the beam measure from the plow share point to the center of the beam. Drill the shank on the burrow builder so that the point of the torpedo on the burrow builder is the same distance from the plow beam as the shank point was originally. (See detail C).

3. Before welding the torpedo to the shank run several beads of hard surfacing electrode on the front of the torpedo. Use an electrode that will produce a deposit having at least a Brinell 450 hardness.

4. The seed tube can be made from one-half inch black pipe. This can be flattened slightly to fit flush with the back edge of the shank.

5. Depth adjustment is made by moving up or down on the shank where a series of holes are provided on the back side of the shank. Use a telescoping connection on the seeder tube connection.

Gopher Burrow Builder

CREDIT: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
The effectiveness of the burrow builder depends upon the gophers finding the artificially-constructed runway and using it long enough to find the poisoned bait. To make this possible, the artificial burrows should be constructed at a depth and spaced so as to cut through the greatest number of natural gopher tunnels. This will vary with soil conditions.

**Pocket Gopher Bait**

The bait used with good success is strychnine-treated barley. This bait is available through the county or township for an organized control program. County agents have information on cost, etc.

**Applying Bait**

Bait is applied to the infested area. Artificial burrows usually are made at 20-foot intervals. For example, in case of an infested field, apply bait on a grid system, running the machine at approximate 20-foot intervals up and down the field. Application rate of bait should vary from 1/2 pound to 1,000 feet of artificial burrow (or 1 pound per acre) to approximately 1 pound per 1,000 feet of burrow (or 2 pounds per acre). The rate of bait application should depend on the population of pocket gophers.

**Manufacturers of Burrow Builders**

- Rue R. Elston Company, Inc., 815 East 79th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55420
- Blackwelder Manufacturing Co., Rio Vista, California
- Schneider Industries
- 334 East Trail, Fort Collins, Colorado
- Star Prairie Welding
- Star Prairie, Wisconsin
- Santa Maria, California

The manufactured machines and the machines built from these plans have been tested and will work, providing soil and moisture conditions are right. Adjustments for draft are made on the burrow builder through the use of levers and turnbuckles much the same as for plows, cultivators and other implements.

Additional information on pocket gopher control with the mechanical burrow builder machine may be secured from your County Extension Agent or the Extension Service, NDSU, Fargo, North Dakota.

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Alfalfa field poisoned with the "Burrow-Builder." Broken lines indicate where the artificial burrows were made.

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