**Fire Ant Diet Information**

**Fire ants are omnivores. They eat both plants and animals to satisfy their nutritional needs. Their menu includes carbohydrates (sugars), lipids (fats), and protein. Worker ants cannot ingest solid food particles (greater than 2 microns, 1 micron = 0.000039 of an inch), so they primarily feed on liquids. Only the last developmental stage of the fire ant larva (fourth instar) can convert solid food particles into a liquid that is then fed to other colony members.**

**Fire ant food preferences include a smorgasbord of plants, microscopic organisms, invertebrates (including arthropods), and vertebrates (reptiles, birds, mammals). Fire ant workers have been known to wander into dirty laundry, probably attracted to the sugarsand/or oils that are soaked into clothing. In companion animal and wildlife areas, fire ant control may be required to reduce losses.**

**In some cases, other pests are prey for fire ants. This food-seeking behavior is considered to beneficial. Fire ants are known to prey on ticks and boll weevils. In other instances, the predatory behavior is can be a serious threat – as when fire ants go after songbirds or endangered or threatened species. In areas of fire ant infestation in the southern U.S., fire ants may be the most dominant predatory insect in the environment. Infestation of new areas, or removal of these exotic invasive fire ant species by any means, will undoubtedly have a profound effect of the flora (plant life) and fauna (animal life).**

**Fire ants, like many other ants, will feed on other food substances like the sweet liquid produced by special plant glands called nectaries; and also on the honeydew produced by sucking insects like aphids, whiteflies, scale insects, and mealybugs (see below). Fire ants tend the insects producing the honeydew by providing them protection from natural enemies (parasites and predators). They also and eliminate diseased or unhealthy individuals, which allows the insects to grow and flourish. This can aggravate the problem caused by the insects in the first place and can result in over-use of pesticides in an attempt to control them. Ant control is often part of the effort for managing sucking insect pests.**

**One of the best tools used to detect and monitor fire ants and other ant species is the use of slices of hot dogs as a food lure. Research on foods that attract foraging fire ant workers has led to development of effective granular bait products. Conventional fire ant bait formulations are made of processed defatted corn grit impregnated with soybean oil. The soybean oil contains the active ingredient, or toxicant that kills the ant. Fire ants feed on the oil and ingest the toxicant.**