

Packinghouse Pest Control

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A food safety plan must address how pests will be controlled and excluded from the packing and storage areas. Pests include rats, mice, chipmunks, birds, etc. can be sources of contamination in produce. Exclusion is a priority for any plan. The first thing to do is an assessment of the facilities. Are all the cracks sealed? Has there been a new water line or electrical service put in the building? These are areas which may be overlooked during installation. Do the doors fit tightly? Doors do not need to be closed when the packinghouse is in operation, but at all other times. If the packinghouse is not enclosed, all the suggestions below still pertain except sealing the facility.

The area around the facility should be litter free and maintain the foliage to less than three inches. Grass and foliage adjacent to the building (two feet) should be removed and replace it with stone. At least weekly trash removal is critical to discourage pests. Cover containers when not in use.

Mice, rats, chipmunks, etc. – Mice and rats can enter through openings $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or larger. Check all the doors, pipes, windows, etc. for any opening that may be larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Seal all those openings with a material that will not be chewed. Once the facility is sealed, determine where traps will be set. No poison is allowed inside the building. There are several trap types that contain glue boards or have a mechanism to hold the rodents until removed. Use rat traps or a mixture of rat and mice traps. Sonic (high pitched sounds) traps are being advertised to chase rodents from buildings. These are not acceptable for food safety. There is no way to determine if rodents were present with these traps.

All traps must be numbered; have a corresponding number on the wall and a map drawn for ease of location. Exterior traps should be checked every two weeks and interior traps every week. Record information such as number of rodents caught, whether activity or not, missing or damaged traps, etc.

Trap placement – Place all traps against walls with the entry hole toward the wall. Rodents will run along wall and into the trap. Unless frightened, rodents do not run across rooms.

Outdoors traps should be placed at 50 ft intervals around the buildings and anchored to a wall, cement wafer or in a box. A rodenticide is permitted exterior to a packinghouse or storage if labeled for that use.

Interior traps are placed approximately 25 ft apart, on both sides of doors. If there is a series of overhead doors place a trap between every 3 to 5 doors. If using glue boards replace them about every two weeks.

Birds – Nesting birds are one of the most difficult issues in open packinghouses. Barn swallows are among the worst since once they imprint on a location they return each year. Cover the ceiling with wood, metal or nylon netting to discourage the birds then remove any nests when noticed. This will be an ongoing activity at least until after mating season. Some growers use owls, scare balloons, flash tape, bird spikes, electronic sound equipment, etc. It probably will take more than one method to control the birds. Evidences of birds are just as important as the actual animal so keep checking.