

BIRD MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES AND LEGALITIES. Managing Damage to Fruit from Migratory Birds.

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Birds damage various fruits in New York, many which are commercial grown and valuable. Fruits sustaining the most damage from birds include grapes, apples, blueberries, and cherries. Other fruits that are damaged include raspberries, elderberries, strawberries, plums, and peaches. Birds damage fruit when the sugar content reaches 11-13° Brix which is about 2-4 weeks before ripening. Damage also tends to occur more often in orchards adjacent to forests and shrublands, to early cultivars, in the early morning, in orchards with little to no human activity, and where hunting is restricted or prohibited for some species. Grapes are most often damaged by robins and starlings. Apples are most often damaged by crows and starlings. Cherries are most often damaged by robins, starlings, and grackles. Blueberries are most often damaged by robins and starlings. Fruit trees may be damaged by Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. About 1% of fruit farms sustain severe damage from birds and about 11% sustain moderate to severe damage from birds. Damage to fruit varies by bird species but may include consumption of the entire fruit to slashing or only removing the pulp from other fruit. Fruit that is slashed or had the pulp removed may rot and contaminate adjacent wholesome fruit. There are numerous management methods available to minimize bird damage to fruit. However, the effectiveness of each management method varies considerably among bird species. Available methods in the tool box include legal hunting, shooting, netting, pyrotechnics, repellents, distress calls, propane exploders, mylar tape, eyespot balloon, and trapping. Federal and state laws and regulations protect migratory birds. A federal permit is required to legally kill a migratory bird to reduce damage. A state permit is also required. Fruit producers must evaluate the damage and decide the most cost effective methods to target the most damaging bird species. Growers should consider netting early and valuable cultivars. Human activity in the orchard in the early morning reduces bird abundance in the orchard. Hazing is effective for about 7 days then declines to ineffective after 13 days. Effective hazing programs use a combination of methods simultaneously. There is a need for more research on methods to reduce damage to fruit. Growers should also educate regulatory agencies and policy makers on the impacts of birds to fruit production.

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