Q&A: Springing Forward with Pest Prevention

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Interview with Patricia Hottel, technical director, McCloud Services

With warmer weather on the horizon, it is important for food manufacturers to put prevention measures in place for warm-weather pests. *Food Manufacturing* spoke with Patricia Hottel about the steps processors can take to get a head start on spring pest prevention.

Q: As spring begins, what should food manufacturers do to get a head start on warm-weather pest prevention?

A: There may be some areas where exterior sealing was difficult to accomplish during the cold winter weather. Take advantage of warmer temperatures to do some of the exclusion work, especially sealing cracks and crevices with sealants that might be temperature sensitive.

It can also be a good time to look at landscaping materials. Products like wood mulch can encourage pest activity. Instead of adding to mulch beds, consider switching to less pest friendly alternatives like gravel. If plants need to be replaced, select plants which are less likely to attract pests or provide cover for pests. Ground covers, or plants which are low growing and spread along the ground, may provide comfort and seclusion for rodents. Plants which produce fruit and seeds may attract rodents, stinging insects and stored product pests. Select plants which are less attractive to insects and rodents and are less likely to shelter rodents.

Q: What are some of the most common pests that arrive in the spring, and what risks do they pose to food facilities?

A: Ants are one of the first pests on the scene in the spring. We will see carpenter ants in pallets where they can potentially contaminate food products or food packaging materials stored on the pallets. Around food facilities, we will also see soil and void nesting ants, which through their foraging activities may contact and

contaminate food products. Many species of ants will produce swarmers or winged reproductives which often make their nuptial flights in the spring. These winged ants pose contamination risks for exposed and open products.

Stored-product pests which may have been less active or even dormant over the winter months start to increase in activity in the spring. Some of the pests like Indianmeal moth and warehouse beetle can move into structures from outdoors. Interior resident populations can start increasing due to temperature increases indoors. Sealing and exclusion work is beneficial to preventing exterior migrations. Interior inspections and monitoring programs are needed for monitoring resident populations.

Q: What is pheromone technology, and how can plants harness it as part of their pest prevention program?

A: Pheromone traps are most commonly used for locating and monitoring stored product pests in food facilities. Some facilities will shut down their pheromone monitoring programs in the winter months in unheated spaces. If they have been removed for the winter, it is now time to refresh and reinstall the traps. Pheromone monitors are useful in several ways, including detecting if there are stored product pests in a facility, pin pointing the locations of the infestation, determining when treatments should be made and if treatment strategies have been effective.

Newer pheromone technology allows us to use pheromones in controlling stored product pests as well. Pheromone mating disruption programs are used to reduce successful mating in the stored product moths like the Indianmeal moth. We have found these programs to be phenomenally effective.

Q: Why should manufacturers prepare their pheromone programs now, rather than wait for warmer weather?

A: We want our pheromone programs up and running in April. Pheromone mating disruption programs should be established in spring as the moths start emerging in April. We want to impact that first generation of moths this spring.

Patricia Hottel is technical director at McCloud Services based in South Elgin, Ill. McCloud Services serves the largest food-related brands in the U.S. For more information, please visit www.mccloudservices.com [1].

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