

## **BIRD CONTROL IN SWEET CORN**

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We grow about 65 acres of sweet corn and vegetables on fields small and scattered over a multiple mile area. Bird problems vary from year to year, crop to crop. Most damage is to germinating and ripening corn as well as tomato fruits, vine crops at germination to true leaf development and ripe strawberries. The primary damaging birds are crows and several species of blackbirds.

There never seems to be one sure way to out smart these villains. The list of what does not work includes balloons, owls and strobe lights. What does work seems to be a mix of cultural modifications along with repelling techniques.

The use of spunbound polyester row covers has eliminated the “bird pull” of early emerging sweet corn. We also transplant all our squash and pumpkins to prevent the same problem.

Five years ago we invested in the “Bird Gard” electronic repelling system. With the proper chip we have found this system to be fairly effective against the blackbird species as well as crows. It should not be overused to the point that species become familiar or adjust to the distress or predator calls.

My favorite attack on crows is to suspend a deceased member above the corn. Not being a hunter I rely on a group of Spring hunters who come to the farm seeking crows during the designated open season. All I ask is for them to collect their victims, leave them, and I then freeze the birds for later use. This summer I started picking up damage on a six acre field of Mirai. In a few days damage and populations escalated rapidly so I hung one bird 4’ to 5’ above the crop and the damage ceased almost immediately.

In summary we have had good luck with the electronic repeller used sparingly at the optimum time. Monitoring for early damage is critical and reacting to changing feeding patterns is important. If damage is not detected early, the likelihood of control is diminished. Keep surprising them with something different.