



Standards for Bird Control in Vineyards

Provided by:



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Robins, Migratory Robins, Cedar Waxwings, and Starlings make up the bulk of the bird threat to ripe grapes in Oregon vineyards. The bird pressure changes from year to year and in a vintage like 2010, the bird damage can be severe. It is crucial that our industry put into place standards for bird control to make our industry more effective in mitigating the bird pressures during harvest time. It is also important to clarify our bird control standards to other stakeholders, neighbors, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), and county officials to ensure they understand why, how, and when we use bird control methods.

Bird Netting. Bird netting is the most effective method to eliminate bird damage but is also the most expensive and involved of the bird control measures. So while it is the most effective control measure, its use is limited due to the significant cost to buy, deploy, and remove netting.

- While netting the whole vineyard provides the most protection, it has been effective to net only parts of it.
- Net the most exposed parts of the block or where the most bird pressure is - like the outside row or the rows near a tree row or power line where birds congregate.
- Netting every ten rows in higher density plantings often provides enough discouragement for birds.

Visual Devices. Balloons, scarecrows, hawk kites, reflective tape, air dancers and other visual devices have a limited but helpful effect on bird control. These devices work best in conjunction with another bird control measure such as netting, propane air cannons or other noise devices.

Propane Cannons. Propane cannons are the most commonly used method to protect bearing, marketable grape crops from bird predation. To increase their effectiveness and to minimize impacts to surrounding neighbors and farm operations, the following practices are strongly recommended if you use propane cannons:

❖ Setbacks

- Under most circumstances the setback should be as far as reasonably possible from neighboring property borders to achieve effective bird control. Do not aim propane cannons at a residence or pasture where there are animals.

❖ Time of Day

- Operate cannons only during daylight hours. No more than thirty minutes before sunrise or after sunset. This is the Golden Rule of operating propane cannons.

❖ Use of Timers

- While not required, timers are highly recommended for use with propane cannons to ensure they turn off at night.
- Pay attention to changing sunrise/sunset timetables and adjust timers accordingly.
- When using a mechanical timer, consider using a light sensor to override the device to ensure cannons are not firing at night. This strategy is strongly recommended for vineyard owners who live off-site.
- When using battery operated timers make sure you replace and check the batteries often.

❖ Magnitude/Decibel Setting

- Cannons are loud! Make sure that there is proper leveling of propane cannons that swivel so they spin uniformly 360 degrees in all directions.

❖ Firing Intervals

- Set firing intervals at a minimum of 7 minutes, with a suggested interval between 10-20 minutes.

❖ Location/Placement

- One cannon per 5-10 acres is appropriate depending on the amount of bird pressure. If netting is used you can use a cannon for more acreage.
- To prevent bird habituation on a weekly basis, reposition air cannons.
- Take into account echoing. Rows of canopy can channel noise. Do not place within a grape row directly in line of your neighbor's house.

❖ Buffers

- Use buffers such as hay bales or corrugated iron to direct sound and to mitigate sound from carrying.

❖ Notification of Neighbors

- It is important to notify neighbors that you will be using propane air cannons and to communicate with them when and for how long you plan to use them.
- Provide your neighbors with a number to contact you or the vineyard manager in case the cannons are left on at night. This is especially important if you or the vineyard manager live off-site and cannot hear the cannons.
- Perform regular checks on your devices to ensure they are working properly.

Additional Noise Devices

❖ Shotguns and Fireworks

- Make sure you have the proper license to use a gun, bottle-rockets, or fireworks. Fireworks permits can be obtained from:

OREGON OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Bureau of Hazardous Materials

Tel: 503-378-6835

- Gun safety is paramount. Do not fire toward your neighbor's property.
- These devices should be used primarily to scare away birds and not to kill birds. In some cases, you will need a permit to kill birds.
- Check with your local wildlife agency to determine if the birds are protected.
- ODA provides information on permits:
www.oregon.gov/ODA/pub_regs_issues.shtml#Bird_predator_and_rodent_damage_control
- As a common courtesy please clean up your gun shell litter after firing.

❖ Alarms/Squawkers

- Like propane cannons, only operate from sun-up to sun-down.
- Frequency intervals should be every 10 minutes at a minimum and the set back should be 410 feet from any neighbor's residence.

❖ Patrolling Vineyard with Noise Makers

- Driving around the vineyard in an ATV or truck honking your horn in high-pressure bird areas can work. Be respectful when driving on a state/county road and honking your horn to scare away birds. Other drivers may not know why you are honking, and may get confused and/or angry.

❖ Natural Predators

- Falconry can be a deterrent in low pressure years. See the following link for more information:
<http://oregonfalconers.com/index.php/falconry/bird-abatement>.
- You can also consult OWA Service Member Airstrike Bird Control: www.airstrikebirdcontrol.com.

❖ Making Bird Control Methods More Effective

Winegrowers should scout their property to determine, based on surrounding vegetation, where the greatest bird pressures are and remove those habitats if possible. An example could be removing a large stand of blackberries near a vineyard site.

“It’s important that we protect the tools and practices Oregon producers need to be productive, competitive and successful. After a difficult growing season, I applaud the Oregon Winegrowers Association for being proactive by communicating effective bird control methods to their membership, policy makers and the public.”

- Barry Bushue, President, Oregon Farm Bureau Federation

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For more information, please visit <http://www.oregonwinegrowers.org/>

Or email us at info@oregonwine.org



Note: A fact sheet developed by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food & Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and information development by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Australia were used in preparing these standards.

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