[QA Online Extra] Ant Control in Food Plants

By Clay Scherer
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Ant species found in food plants are mostly determined by their geographical region. For example, plants in the Southeast may see the red imported fire ant (RIFA) or the Argentine ant. Across the Midwest, Central and Northern states, food plants may have problems with pavement ants and odorous house ants. In the West, the argentine ants are a big problem.

As you can imagine, food plants are considered "sensitive" accounts by pest management professionals and typically request the most current Integrated Pest Management practices. Depending on the type of ant, pest management professionals can select different control techniques to achieve the fastest and most thorough control.

Pavement ants or RIFAs are considered soil nesting ants and can be easily controlled with bait products with granular baits being particularly effective on these species. In some indoor situations, the granular baits can be placed inside bait stations or containers. Some solid or semi-solid bait formulations are available pre-packaged in small, ready-to-use containers and also are effective on these species.

Another group of ants are considered tramp ants and include Pharaoh, ordorous house and Argentine ants. These ants have multiple queens in their colonies, and create multiple nests that can be located throughout an area, not limited to just soil. Tramp ants are harder to control and if granular baits or containerized baits are not successful as the first attempt at control, the PCO should conduct more thorough inspections and try gel baits or liquid baits. These species often prefer the combination of water and sweet nutrients contained in these bait formulations and will recruit heavily to them.

Plants that specialize in organic food material receive a special certification from the National Organic Program (NOP), which is administered by USDA. These organic food plants have the same pest control standards as any other plant, but follow their own defined procedures. First, they identify the infestation, determine how the pests got in and why exclusion practices didn't work. Second, they consider non-chemical approaches such as trapping, vacuums or sticky traps. If these measures do not control the infestation, they submit paperwork to justify the use of pest control materials from an approved organic list.

If the pest problem persists, which can often be the case, the plant submits further paperwork to justify the use of synthetic pest control solutions. Organic food plants and all other plants have options today of pesticides classified as "reduced risk" by EPA, based on their environmental and toxicological profiles.

The author is global product development manager for DuPont Professional Products.

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