

## Establishing a Scouting Program - Step by Step

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### What is scouting?

Scouting/monitoring is the regular and systematic inspection of crops and other detection tools (sticky cards, etc.) to identify insect pests, diseases, nutrient deficiencies and other problems. It is a cornerstone of effective IPM. How can you manage your pest problems if you don't know what's there? A sound scouting program provides 1) early detection of pest problems, and locates areas prone to problems; 2) trends in the population levels of the pest or biological control agent; 3) enables the grower to identify the optimal time and method for treatment; and 4) measures the effectiveness of a management action (biological control or chemical insecticide treatment). A grower must develop a scouting program that works for him/her, taking into consideration how much time is available, and the severity of past pest problems. An effective scouting program will save time and money in the long run by allowing the grower to manage problems early. It is best to use a consistent approach, even if time is short.



Examples of scouting tools

### How do I develop a scouting program?

#### 1. Identify the scout and determine amount of time to spend on this activity per week per house.

Scout: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Allotment per House per Week: \_\_\_\_\_

The amount of time a scout spends monitoring the crop may change over the season. Early in the growing season there may be more time available to inspect the crop. As the season progresses, growers often find they have less time to invest in scouting, though this is often when scouting is most important. It is best to set up a standard program and try to stick to it, even when there is less time available.

#### 2. Gather background information (Refer to your completed site survey)

- Historic problem areas (Crops prone to infestation or disease, places with poor drainage, leaks or algae accumulation, limited air movement, cold and hot spots, weed prone areas, poor pest exclusion zones)
- Planting schedule and plant movement pattern to and from other houses
- Irrigation type
- Pesticide applications and rates
- Equipment
- Fertilizer and media (current pH and EC)
- Biological control agents and releases

#### 3. Gather materials

Hand lens, mini-microscopes, opti-visor or magnifying glass ( at least 10x), EC or pH meters, disposable gloves to touch diseased plants, containers or baggies to collect specimens for id, sticky cards, plan ahead for plant-mediated IPM system use (indicator plants, banker plants etc.) or develop planting schedule for them, colored survey flags or flagging tape, hand counter/tally meter, potato disks for fungus gnat monitoring.

#### 4. Compile a notebook or system for record keeping (Provided for you).

This is your resource base! It can contain the following: blank and completed scouting forms, greenhouse maps, information on biological control use or pesticide applications, fertilizer rates, pesticide labels fact sheets, virus testing results etc.

