Control of Bird Damage in Tomatoes

Recognize the problem

Bird damage causes significant economic losses to tomatoes. Bird damaged fruit is susceptible to micro-organisms (diseases), which reduce the fruit’s quality and storability. The fruit will therefore be unfit for human consumption.

Background

Tomatoes can be grown throughout the year in the tropical region which has a wet and dry season leading to a permanent food supply for birds.

The sparrow is a nuisance to outdoor-field production of tomato. Their population has increased recently and you are not allowed to use ammunition or toxic bait to control them.

Management

- Erect netting over the tomato plants. This must be supported and suspended overhead by a simple but firm structured frame. Cover over the entire row of plants down to the ground. The holes of the net-protected covering must be smaller than the size of the birds.
- Screen netting is another choice. In addition to keeping out birds, most small insect pests are kept out yet the screen still allows adequate ventilation. Erect screen netting as for the net-protected covering, or just place directly over the total plant touching the ground. The disadvantage is that insect pollination is prevented which is a problem unless the plants are self-fertile.
- If plants need insect pollination, fold the covering back temporarily (a few days) to allow pollinating insects to enter before fruit production.
- Should chemical treatment be required fold back the netting and then return it after the spraying task is complete.
- The netting can be conveniently removed and placed over tomatoes or other similar crops in subsequent years.

Scientific name(s) > Solanum lycopersicum

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Barbados