Pets and wild animals are potential sources of foodborne pathogens that can introduce disease-causing microorganisms from their feces on the farm. Soils become naturally contaminated with animal manure, and cross-contamination of fruit and vegetable products can occur. While it is impossible to exclude all animals from the field, producers must demonstrate that they are implementing strategies to reduce intrusions and reduce the risk of contamination if signs of intrusion are observed.

Key Components of On-farm Animal Exclusion

Domesticated Animals

Animals often are an integral part of a farm. Cats and dogs can deter rodents and wild animals from entering the farm, grazing animals are sustainable sources of fertility and livestock and poultry are sources of food.

Although pets such as dogs and cats often are considered a part of the family, every effort must be made to keep them out of production fields, irrigation ponds, packing areas or houses, storage rooms, transport vehicles and any other area where fresh produce is handled.

Cattle, goats, sheep, chickens and other grazing animals are permitted in fruit and vegetable production fields only when they are used to graze in rotation with crops or they are used to clean up a field or orchard after harvest has been completed. If a fruit and vegetable production field is used for grazing animals, the herd must be removed from the field 90 days prior to harvest.

Farms that use livestock as work animals must address possible sources of contamination and have detailed standard operating procedures in place to reduce potential hazards.

Producers must also consider the following items when raising both domesticated animals and fruit and vegetable crops on the same farm.

• All domesticated animals should be restricted from any open surface water that is used for irrigation.

• Install a containment system for runoff from the barnyard that can handle up to a 5 inch rainfall event.

• Because young animals (less than 5 months old) and newly introduced animals are most likely to become infected by diseases and spread diseases, their manure should be kept separate from older animal manure if it is to be used in compost or applied to production fields.

• No raw (noncomposted) manure should be applied to fields within 90 days before harvest of any fruit or vegetable crop.

• Never transport fresh or composted manures in the same vehicle as fresh fruit and vegetables.

Wild Animals

Complete exclusion of wild animals from a farm is unachievable. But safety protocols must be put into place to demonstrate the producer is reducing farm
intrusion as much as possible from birds, rodents, opossums, skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, deer, wild hogs and others.

Addressing Animal Disturbances

Your standard operating procedures (plans of action) should provide specific details about actions you will take if there is animal intrusion or contamination event. Recommendations to minimize the hazards associated with animal intrusions are provided below.

Field

• Scout the field daily, if possible, and immediately prior to harvesting. Look for any fresh manure that has touched the plants or product. If evidence of fresh manure is in the field, mark off the contaminated area and do not harvest that produce.

• In areas with heavy deer and wild hog populations, install electrical fencing around production fields.

• Fix all irrigation leaks and install efficient drains in fields to reduce flooding events. This will reduce wild waterfowl from entering fields.

• Remove all culls from the fields. Place culled materials into closed trash cans or in compost piles that are not within 100 feet of the production field.

• Use flashing lights, water guns, scarecrows, shiny objects, bird netting and other means of distraction on a rotating basis to discourage animals from entering the field.

Storage and Packing Areas

• Discourage birds from roosting and rodents from entering packing and storage areas by installing screens on doors and windows. Place rubber snakes, flashing objects or other means of distracting birds in rafters.

• Set, regularly change and inspect rodent traps in all barns, storage areas and packing areas.

• Routinely spray for and develop an insect management plan for all storage and packing areas.

• Remove all culls from packing and storage areas. Place culls in compost bins or trash bins to discourage rodents, skunks, raccoons, opossums and others.

Record Keeping

Keep records of all precautions used to discourage domesticated and wild animals from entering your fields. When animal intrusions occur, record the date, location of the affected area, type of crop and corrective actions that were taken to minimize the food safety risks.