

System to detect objects in food products

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Field tests are to begin this summer on a system designed to detect plastic and other foreign objects in food products.

Detectors now used by food processors can keep metal fragments out of finished products, but as plastic use becomes more widespread, plastic contamination is a growing concern.

For the past year, John Stewart, a research engineer at the Georgia Tech Research Institute, has been leading a team in building a computer-vision system to identify plastic and other unwanted elements in finished food products.

The system, now in final development stages, will undergo field-testing later this summer.

Use of humans to inspect products is not efficient. Although people are easily trained, they are also easily distracted, said GTRI Research Engineer Doug Britton.

"The product stream is moving very quickly -- about 12 feet per second, which is the equivalent of eight miles per hour. If a person blinks or looks away for even a second, they can miss a problem," Britton explained. "In contrast, machine vision is very diligent. It doesn't get tired or bored."

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