Wild Oat

Thistle

Ragwort

Dock

Herbicides for the control of Noxious Weeds

Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Well managed grassland is the cheapest source of food for cattle and sheep and an important aspect of good management is the control of weeds in the grazing sward. Weeds are damaging to the sward because they occupy space within the sward and use soil nutrients that could be exploited by more productive grass species.

While it is recognised that weeds reduce grass yields, some weed species can have other detrimental effects - buttercup can taint milk as well as reducing overall milk yield. Other plants such as ragwort (also called ragweed or benweed) are toxic to cattle and, despite the widely held belief, sheep are just as susceptible to ragwort poisoning. The practice of allowing sheep access to ragwort-infested pasture to assist in clearing it of the weed is definitely not recommended.

When weeds are permitted to grow unrestricted they will spread to neighbouring land. Ragwort and thistle seeds in particular easily spread as their seeds are carried easily by the wind.

It is important to remember that under The Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, ragwort, creeping thistle, spear thistle, broad leafed docks, curled leafed docks and wild oats are classified as noxious weeds. DAERA has powers under the Order to insist that these weeds are destroyed under notice and failure to comply with such a requirement could result in prosecution.

The annual cutting of noxious weeds has little or no benefit as a long-term control measure though it may limit seed production and dispersal. Herbicides are generally very effective and, when used in co-ordination with other good sward management practices, should prevent weeds spreading to adjacent land.

Care should be taken when filling and applying herbicides to ensure none enter any drains or waterways as grassland herbicides are the most commonly detected pesticides in local drinking water catchments, MCPA being of particular concern. When spraying observe buffer zones and, where possible, use low drift nozzles. Also when spraying is finished ensure that sprayers are cleaned and stored under cover to prevent rain washing any contamination on the sprayer into drains.

A Water Catchment Partnership has been formed to highlight the issue of pesticides in local water catchments and is seeking to raise awareness of the issue with local users. CAFRE will be supporting this with localised delivery of Grassland Weed Control Workshops. For details contact your local CAFRE livestock advisor.

Important

Farmers who are in the ESA schemes are restricted in what they may apply to the land. They should contact their Countryside Management Branch representative for advice.

These are a selection of the herbicides treatments currently available.

Docks

Herbicide:

For general dock control
(not clover safe)

- dicamba/mecoprop-P
- fluroxypyr
- triclopyr
- clopyralid/triclopyr
- aminopyralid/triclopyr

Some of these herbicides can be used alone or in combination with each other and some may not have approval for agricultural grassland but always follow instructions and conditions on the product label.

For grass and clover
(clover may be inhibited by the treatment).

- amidosulfuron

Timing:
Spray in late April or early May when the docks are actively growing with a large leaf area and before the plants have begun to flower and again in late August or early September. One application is usually not sufficient to control docks. Repeat sprays in the same or subsequent years will give much better control of this deep-rooted weed. Restrictions may apply to grazing or subsequent cropping – follow label instructions closely.

Creeping Thistle

Herbicide:

For creeping thistle control
(not clover safe)

- 2,4-D
- dicamba/mecoprop-P
- clopyralid
- clopyralid/triclopyr
- clopyralid/fluroxypyr /triclopyr
- MCPA

For creeping thistle control
(clover safe but clover may be inhibited)

- MCPB

Timing:
Spray in May, June or July when the creeping thistles are actively growing with a large leaf area and before the plants have begun to shoot and flower.

Ragwort

Herbicide:

For ragwort control
(not clover safe)
- MCPA
- 2,4-D
- aminopyralid/fluroxpyr

For ragwort control
(clover safe, but clover may be inhibited)
- MCPB

Timing:
These herbicides offer good control, but this needs to be a targeted programme applied at the rosette stage in spring when the ragwort are actively growing, with a large leaf area and again before flowering in the second year. Dose rates must be carefully planned.

WARNING: **Animals should be restricted from sprayed pasture in strict accordance with the instructions on the product label.**

Wild Oats

Wild oats (Avena fatua L.) are a problem when infesting arable crops and can cause considerable yield reduction.

Herbicide:

For limited wild oat control
(Not suitable for undersown crops. Should be used with recommended adjuvant).
- **pinoxaden**

Timing:
Spray cereals in autumn, winter or spring from the 2-leaf stage. Latest use before flag leaf extending stage. Use within a resistance management strategy.

Training and Certification

From ***26th November 2015*** all operators who apply professional pesticide products ***MUST*** be in possession of an accredited certificate of competence. CAFRE provide training and this can be arranged by contacting:

WEB: **https://os.cafre.ac.uk/website/onlineservices/courses.aspx**
(select Industry Training - Agriculture)

EMAIL: **industry.trainingadmin@daera-ni.gov.uk**

TEL: **028 9442 6880**

From ***26th November 2016*** all sprayer application equipment (excluding handheld and knapsack) ***MUST*** have a certificate showing it has passed an independent inspection before it can be used. The Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA) currently runs the National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS). To enquire about sprayer inspections contact:

WEB: **www.nsts.org.uk/**

EMAIL: **info@nsts.org.uk**

TEL: **084 5644 8748**

See also DAERA publication 'Pesticide Spraying Law Changes'

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