

## **MINISTER WALLACE LAUNCHES AUTUMN PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR THE CONTROL OF RAGWORT**

**The Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Mary Wallace T.D., today reminded all landowners and users of land that now is the time to take action to control the noxious weed, ragwort.**

Late autumn (mid September - mid November) or early spring (February - mid March) are recommended periods for spraying *ragwort*, with an appropriate herbicide, on lands destined for grazing or conservation for hay or silage. *Ragwort* plants become more palatable after spraying and consequently livestock must be kept off treated fields and fodder conservation delayed until all plants are dead and sufficiently rotted down, which is why late autumn or early spring are ideal spraying periods.

This public awareness campaign is directed at landowners and local authorities for the control of weeds designated as noxious. Weeds, which must be controlled in pastureland under the Act are *ragwort*, *thistle* and *dock*.

Minister Wallace said there were very good reasons for designating *ragwort* noxious under the Act, as it is poisonous to animals when grazed or when it is consumed in hay or silage. The fact that *ragwort* is poisonous to animals also makes it an animal welfare issue and financial loss from animal deaths and restricted growth also occurs. Furthermore, she said that where noxious weeds are not controlled, their seeds spread to adjoining lands, thereby causing further infestation, to the annoyance of neighbours.

Minister Wallace noted that the Act provides for penalties for convicted offenders and said the control of noxious weeds is now a cross-compliance requirement for Single Farm Payment under Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition. Failure to comply with this condition may result in a reduction in the Single Farm Payment.

In conclusion, Minister Wallace went on to say that farmers, developers and those whose lands contain *ragwort* should seek advice on control methods from their local Teagasc advisor or, alternatively, consult the *Teagasc fact sheet on ragwort* at

**[www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie) <http://www.teagasc.ie>**

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Powers for the control of noxious weeds are vested in the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Noxious Weeds Act, 1936.

The Act only covers weeds that adversely affect agricultural production. Weed species, such as *Japanese Knotgrass*, *Giant Hogweed*, *Rhododendron* etc. are classified as invasive species and come under the remit of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Ministerial Orders designating certain weeds noxious have been made from time to time, as the need arose.

List of weeds designated noxious is as follows:

- \* **Thistle, Ragwort and Dock - 1937 Order**
- \* **Common Barbery - 1958 Order**
- \* **Male Wild Hop Plant - 1965 Order**
- \* **Wild Oat - 1973 Order**

The reasons for designating them noxious are varied. *Ragwort* is poisonous to herbivores when grazed or consumed in hay or silage. *Thistle* and *dock* in grassland and wild oat in cereal crops reduce yields appreciably. Also, their seeds spread widely, mainly by wind, resulting in clean lands becoming contaminated. Male wild hop plant cross-pollinates with cultivated varieties, thereby reducing the quality of the latter. Common barberry harbours black stem rust, which is a disease that attacks cultivated cereal crops.

Under the Act, it is an offence not to prevent the growth and spread of noxious weeds. The owner, occupier, user or manager of lands on which these weeds are growing is liable, upon conviction, to a fine. In the case of fences and margins of public road the local authority charged with the maintenance of such roads is responsible under the Act.

Under the Single Payment Scheme, farmers are required to maintain land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition as part of Cross-Compliance. One of the conditions laid down is that appropriate measures must be adopted to minimise the spread of noxious weeds. Failure to comply with this condition may result in a reduction in the Single Farm Payment.

#### ***Chemical Control of Ragwort in pasture areas***

Herbicides work best on *ragwort* in the rosette stage of growth. *Ragwort* plants become more palatable after spraying and consequently livestock must be kept off treated fields, and fodder conservation delayed until all plants are dead and sufficiently rotted down. Given such restrictions on pastureland, the best window of opportunity for spraying, with an appropriate herbicide, is late autumn (mid Sept. - mid Nov.) or early spring (mid Feb. - mid Mar.).

Farmers, developers etc whose lands contain *ragwort* should seek advice on control methods from their local Teagasc advisor *or*, alternatively, consult the Teagasc fact sheet on *ragwort* at **[www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)**.

**Department of Agriculture and Food**  
**An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Bia**  
**Government of Ireland**

**[www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie)**