



Your ref:

Our ref: RagDors

Email: gemma.harvey@nfu.org.uk

Direct line: 07590 443413

Date: 19 July 2024

Dear Sirs,

National Farmers Union: Ragwort on Dorset Highways.

The NFU is an organisation that has a major interest in land management in Dorset and across the South region. The NFU has over 10,000 members in the South region and around 1000 in Dorset.

This letter is to draw your attention to the increasing problem of ragwort infestation on verges alongside our county highways. Through contact from our members and with members of the public, the NFU is very aware that the amount of ragwort on highways is increasing. We know that your authority has a proactive approach and we very much value this, hence our letter to you now.

What are we advising farmers to do?

We are advising our members to be vigilant of ragwort and the potential risk it can have for livestock; where ragwort occurs on their farm, we advise our members to take appropriate action. Where they do see it off their farm, we recommend they contact the landowner and look to resolve the issue quickly and amicably. NFU staff are available to help mediate. Members of the NFU in Dorset are very concerned about the current situation and the potential consequences for their livelihoods if the plant is allowed to spread unchecked from the abundant populations on the highways network onto agricultural land.

Ragwort is classified as an injurious weed under the Weeds Act 1959. Whilst it is not an offence to have these weeds growing on your land, it must not be allowed to spread to agricultural land, particularly grazing areas or land which is used to produce conserved forage such as hay or silage. Enforcement notices can be issued following complaints, requiring landowners to take action to prevent the spread of these weeds. We advise members who have not had their issues resolved through informal communication to contact Natural England and put in an official complaint.

What is the risk from ragwort?

Ragwort poses a serious risk to animal health; if ingested by horses and livestock in either its green or dried state it can be fatal. Left unchecked, a ragwort problem is likely to become worse by acting as a reservoir for seeds and spread; a single specimen can produce up to 150,000 seeds with a germination rate of up to 70%. Even when cut and pulled, flowering ragwort may still set seed. So, it is important to dispose of ragwort appropriately once removed.

How can you best manage ragwort?

The most effective approach to management of ragwort is via a combination of pulling and disposing of the vegetation responsibly, as well as the use of specific herbicide controls, such as glyphosate. Given that ragwort is a toxic plant, suitable precautions must be taken when handling both live and dead plants; hands must be protected and arms and legs should be covered.

Conclusion

Given the high levels of ragwort currently observable along our county highways, we would urge you to ensure that this is not allowed to spread unchecked from land under your management. If you would like to discuss the issue with me further, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details contained within this letter

Yours sincerely



Gemma Harvey
NFU Dorset County Adviser