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Leafy spurge viewpoint from Weed and Pest supervisor

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I am glad to be here today and have an opportunity to speak.

When Tom Whitson called me and asked if I would speak on a County Supervisors viewpoint of a Leafy Spurge Control Program, several things came to mind and Tom made a few suggestions.

The two main things I want to cover briefly, is if we could go back to the beginning, how would you set up a County Leafy Spurge Control Program, and second, I will give you a brief overview of what the Leafy Spurge Control Program has done in our county and where we are trying to improve it.

But before getting into this I would like to pass along a little story concerning leafy spurge.

In Sheridan County we have a leafy spurge fieldman and when I first met him several years ago, he was taking me around and showing me some spurge. One day we were out by his place and we stopped in. He was showing me some weeds he had and his horse, now Chuck was quite a cowboy and roper, and he explained to me that "Bob, when I retire, me and that horse are gonna grow old together". Well I thought that was pretty nice.

While I was working up this speech it came to me that coordinating a county leafy spurge program had saved me a great expense. I didn't need to buy a horse to grow old with, coordinating a leafy spurge program will do that for me.

With that in mind, if I were to start over I believe a new program should be centered around two things, information and education.

You need to inform and educate yourself first to leafy spurge, its identification and its characteristics, also you need to learn about all control measures that are available, such as chemical, mechanical, biological. Second you need to educate and inform all the residents in the county about leafy spurge.

In starting a new program you will need to sit down and design a program for your county.

One of the first priorities will be to come up with an inventory of the acres of leafy spurge you have.

If we did go back I would recommend that an inventory be broken down as to where the spurge is located, such as what percent is located in range lands, crops, riparian, etc. Where the spurge is located and how much you have will dictate your total costs.

The inventory is one area our program had some problems. Estimating a particular weed species infestation within a county is a hard and difficult job to undertake. You will probably revise your estimate several times as we did.

Along the inventory lines a good management tool is the use of a helicopter to survey your Leafy spurge with.

In setting up your program, there is a need to develop some type of written cooperative agreement between the landowner and the Weed and Pest District. It should outline the work to be done over an estimated period of time. The agreement should also specify the type of control practices, especially chemical types and when and what rates it will be applied at. Who is going to do the work and estimate as to the acres of leafy spurge.

It is at your first contact getting people signed up, that you can collect some of your acreage data on an individual basis.

During these contacts it is important to explain to the landowner, that he is entering into a control program, not an eradication. People have signed up on a three-four year program and thought in this amount of time they would be rid of their spurge.

We need to educate the people to the idea that once they have leafy spurge, they stand a good chance of always having it.

I think it can be explained simply that a landowner may have 500 acres of spurge and need 500 gallons of chemical to treat it for the first year. He may need 250 gallons the second and eventually only need 1 gallon, but he needs to check that 500 acres each year and all of his land each year from now on.

I mentioned earlier education of yourself and those with the spurge, also you need to consider educational programs and materials for people not infested. This will enable them to be aware of leafy spurge so that small outbreaks can be identified and worked on immediately.

One of the best products to do this with is the 3" x 5" leafy spurge color post card put together by the Wyoming Weed & Pest Council. It shows the plant in bloom, the roots and flowering head along with a descriptive write-up on the back.

Along the education line you can utilize the standard ways, newspaper articles, visual aids, handouts, plant mounts. Our winter meetings have a portion of the slide show just for leafy spurge.

Last summer we grew leafy spurge in a greenhouse and along with a write-up put the potted plants in town at the Co-ops, seed stores, etc. It's a good idea, but you need to remember to remove the plants before they go to seed, or you might get the comment, "Looks like the Weed & Pest hasn't got enough leafy spurge, they are growing it in the seed store".

One problem you might encounter with people is that how can one plant create such a county or statewide stir.

We've had this stuff for 30 years, what's the excitement now? In these types of contact you need to have some good information lined up.

Sometimes pictures will work, or showing the person what spurge can really do, will help.

Two of our harder cooperators to sign up made trips to Montana last summer and both saw what leafy spurge can become. Both came back and signed up on the program and are two of our most active spurge fighters.

Funding for a program is a key factor, this is going to involve coordination and cooperation with County Commissioners, State Legislators, state agencies and federal agencies.

There are many stumbling blocks and at times the red tape and problems can seem impossible, but they can be overcome.

In looking at our program I feel since 1978 our program has been successful in stopping the rapid spread of Leafy spurge and reduced the amount of acres visibly infested with Leafy spurge.

One of the more exciting things for us in leafy spurge has been our trial of one quart of Tordon 22K, put on with four and three fourths gallons of water per acre with a helicopter. This treatment was done once in the spring and once in the fall.

We have achieved a good kill on the spurge and the native grasses have responded to the lighter rates of Tordon. With this treatment we are blanket spraying areas with visible leafy spurge and areas known to have had leafy spurge in the past.

Failure wise, we have had some of the more common problems, chemicals applied wrong, either in amounts per acre or timing, funding shortages, people who were reluctant to sign up and cooperate.

Three of the major areas our program has had problems with and we are working at to correct are: First, we did not do a good enough job informing the people that this was a control program. People signed up with the idea they could spray three or four times and be done.

Second, whenever you sign someone up on a cooperative agreement they should fully understand the agreement.

Last, this item came out to me last summer as I was driving by a pasture in August where the leafy spurge had been sprayed recently with a ground rig and a handgun. It appeared to me that the spraying had done a good job of killing the spurge, but in walking around the area something seemed wrong. It then struck me that this cooperator had done a good job on his spurge but left twice the Canada thistle in the pasture unsprayed getting ready to go to seed.

In talking to other people it became apparent that some people were fighting leafy spurge and neglecting the other weeds.

I realize this is a leafy spurge symposium, but I feel it is important that we impress upon people the total weed control concept, because we are all in the weed control business.

In closing I would like to say that from a County Supervisor's viewpoint we have completed a lot of the easy leafy spurge work and are now entering into the hard work of the continuous retreat and watching for the treating those small isolated spurge patches.

With that I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, and I hope I have given you some food for thought.