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Lincoln, NE. July 22-24, 1992. 3:7.*

*Sponsored by: United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service,  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, DowElanco, Nebraska Leafy Spurge Working Task  
Force.*

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## **Noxious weed seed free forage and their use in federal lands**

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Over the past 10 to 12 years, numerous individuals and organizations have been pushing for stronger weed management program within the state of Montana. One program that has come up repeatedly was a state wide clean hay program to help manage and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. The Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Hay (MNWSFH) program was developed to meet that challenge and has shown great success in meeting the need for noxious weed seed free forage.

The MNWSFH program has been functioning since 1989. The program has been administered by the Montana Extension Service and coordinated by Gene Surber, Gallatin County Extension Agent and Larry Hoffman, Lewis and Clark County Extension Agent. Initial strong interest in the program has leveled off since 1990 with the major buyers of NWSFH being recreational areas and wildlife areas.

Currently the USDA Forest Service is expanding the prevention segment of its Noxious Weed Program within several forests in the Northern Region, as well as other areas. The enforcement mechanism used is the issuance of closure orders which in effect prohibit the transport or use of any hay or feeds in a designated area, unless it meets specific standards. In the northern region, the requirement is that the agronomic products be certified noxious weed seed free. Similar closure orders are being utilized in the Intermountain and Rocky Mountain Regions.

A number of states including Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and others have also developed Noxious Weed Seed Free Hay programs with varying degrees of success. Wyoming has led an effort to formulate a regional hay certification program; however, most states seem to prefer to establish their intrastate program before expanding to an inter-state program. Overall the market for noxious weed seed free hay appears to be expanding with the Federal Government being the biggest buyer of this commodity.