

Farm Practices in B.C. Reference Guide

Strengthening Farming Program



Ministry of
Agriculture
and Food

FACTSHEET

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FARM ACTIVITY: WEED CONTROL

Description

Farmers control weeds to increase plant growth, to improve crop yield and quality, and to reduce habitat for insect and disease vectors. They may also control weeds to prevent a buildup of weed seeds in the soil, to keep their farms safe from wildfires and other hazards, and to reduce grain dockage and livestock losses resulting from poisonous plant infestations.

In addition, farmers are obligated under the provincial *Weed Control Act* to control noxious weeds. Province-wide noxious designations as per the Weed Control Act's Weed Control Regulations apply to 39 plant species in B.C. Another 27 plant species are designated noxious within specific regions. Legislated noxious weeds must be controlled to prevent the injurious distribution of seeds.

Activities and Operations

Weed Control Goals

On-farm weed control programs are designed to accomplish suppression of weed growth, prevention or suppression of weed seed production, reduction of weed seed reserves in the soil, prevention or reduction of weed spread, and noxious weed eradication.

Practices that help prevent weeds from becoming a problem include sowing high-quality cleaned seed which is low/free of weed seed content, cleaning farm machinery, cleaning animals before moving them, using soil amendments with organic material, including compost and manure, that have been exposed to high temperatures for a prolonged period of time, (if unsure if weed species are exterminated a germination test is recommended), and using total farm weed control practices. Such practices include weed control along fence lines, irrigation ditches, farm roads, stockyards and any other on-farm sources of weed seeds.

See also Farm Practice: [Farmstead Maintenance](#)

Integrated Weed Management

Integrated Weed Management is a balanced approach which includes:

- Using integrated practices to prevent weed introduction on farm;
- Having the knowledge to properly identify weeds and their growth habit to effectively control;
- Noting weed inventories, mapping and monitoring weed populations, and impacts on production;
- Making control decisions based on knowledge of potential impacts, cost of control, and environmental effect of the control decision; and
- Control strategies that include a combination of methods are often most effective to reduce weed populations to acceptable levels; continual evaluation of the strategy and effects of management decisions are important. It is important to note that successful control methods will vary depending on the weed species present and its growth habit.

Weed Control Methods – Biological

Biological weed control involves natural agents like insects, nematodes, fungi, or viruses. Agents used for this purpose undergo rigorous testing to ensure specificity to the target weed species. Classical biocontrol agents (usually specialized insects) are not released in British Columbia until approval has been obtained via the provincial [Biocontrol Process in British Columbia](#).

Weed Control Methods – Chemical

Farmers use herbicides to control or suppress undesirable vegetation. All herbicides used must be federally registered. Farmers must follow label directions and obey all pesticide laws. All herbicide labels can be found on Health Canada's [Pesticide Label Search](#) website.

Weed Control Methods – Cultural

Cultural practices can be used to suppress weeds and to provide a competitive advantage to the crop being grown. Seedbed preparation techniques, seeding rates, variety selection, drainage, fertilization, the use of cover crops, and crop rotation are among the cultural practices used.

Weed Control Methods – Physical

- **Burning:** Fire can be used to destroy weed seeds and mature weeds. Flaming machines may be used to kill weed top growth between crop rows.

- **Cultivation:** Tillage kills weeds by burying the entire weed, depleting weed food reserves, exposing underground propagules to frost or desiccation, and encouraging the rotting of underground propagules. Cultivation can be done any time during the growing season such as prior to seeding, while the crop is growing, and after harvest.
See also Farm Practices: [Farmstead Maintenance](#)
[Mobile Equipment](#)
- **Grazing:** Horses, sheep, goats, hogs and cattle can be used to control weeds.
- **Hand Weeding:** Hand weeding can be used for small plots or areas.
- **Mowing:** Tractor-operated mowing equipment, gas-powered handheld mowers, weed eaters, and the like are used to prevent weed seed production and to deplete underground food reserves.
- **Mulching:** Mulches such as clean straw, hay, manure, tar paper, sawdust and dark-coloured plastics can be used to control weeds.

Machinery is not permitted in watercourses frequented by fish unless approved by the federal Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). There are also restrictions on working around water in B.C; see the provincial webpage [Working Around Water](#).

See also Farm Practices: [Cultivation](#)
[Mobile Equipment](#)

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The provincial *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that a “farm operation” must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act* and the regulations under those Acts, as well as any land use regulation (amongst other requirements), to be protected from liability in nuisance, from being prevented from conducting that farm operation by court order, and from the application of certain local government bylaws. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices, and farmers affected should contact their relevant local government for more information.

Some of the Acts, regulations, and bylaws that may be relevant to this topic may include the following:

Federal Legislation

The *Fisheries Act* protects fish and fish habitat in ditches, streams, rivers and wetlands and prohibits the discharge of deleterious substances such as fertilizers, manure and

pesticides into watercourses frequented by fish, or that may end up in water frequented by fish. It also prohibits the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of “fish habitat”.

Provincial Legislation

The *Plant Protection Act* and its regulations establish preventative measures, and inspection and treatment programs to mitigate the spread of certain pests, insects or diseases that are destructive to plants.

The *Weed Control Act* and its Weed Control Regulations place the responsibility for control of “noxious weeds” on land “occupiers”.

Local Government

Local government powers may include weed control bylaws which implement the *Weed Control Act*.

Publications

Publications that provide more information on weed control include the following:

[*Biological Weed Control in British Columbia*](#)

[*Guide to Weed in British Columbia*](#)

[*Seven Steps to Managing Your Weeds*](#)

[*Resources and Publications for Invasive Species*](#)

[*BC Invasive Species Council Resources Library*](#)

A variety of crop production and management guides for various commodities can also provide useful related information.