

Hay & Noxious Weeds

As we approach fall, many of us who have been busy planting, irrigating, and harvesting are ready for a brief break. In addition to the time and care spent on field crops, managing noxious weeds has been another challenge that many are eager to pause. However, now is not the time to completely set aside weed management. The specific strategies we employ this fall and winter can significantly impact the number of noxious weeds we face next year.

Let's talk about hay. In many of our beef operations, hay is fed and scattered across fields during winter to sustain cattle. Unfortunately, the hay may contain noxious weed seeds. When cattle consume the hay and trample it into the snow-covered soil, those seeds are left behind. Combined with the moisture from the snow, this creates an ideal environment for them to sprout in early spring. One weed I've become particularly concerned about is annual kochia and its prevalence in some of our fields and pastures.

Here are a couple of strategies to help prevent noxious weeds from establishing in your pasture:

First, maintain a healthy grass pasture. Often, the best weed prevention is a lush, well-managed pasture. To achieve this, avoid overgrazing and follow the "leave 4" rule—leaving at least 4 inches of grass after grazing. Proper irrigation and fertilization are essential to providing your pasture with the resources it needs. While dryland pastures pose more challenges due to limited resources, it's important to do the best you can with what's available, as they are particularly susceptible to noxious weeds.

Second, be proactive in identifying noxious weeds in your hay and pasture. I have resources available to help you with weed identification, or I can assist if you provide a sample—either in person or via a picture. Identifying weeds early allows you to address potential threats to your pasture and develop a management plan to control them before they spread. It's also critical to identify noxious weeds because some are toxic to livestock. While animals typically avoid poisonous plants in a pasture, they can't always distinguish them in hay bales. Avoid purchasing hay that contains noxious weeds whenever possible. While this year's hot and dry conditions have made it harder to avoid annual weeds in hay, eliminating them from your feed will significantly reduce future weed problems.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the USU Extension office in Juab County at 435-623-3450 or email me at jacob.hadfield@usu.edu. I'm happy to help in any way I can.