

Weed Free Forage and Mulch in California

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Hay, raw feeds, and straw can contain germinable weed seeds if grown in fields where weeds are allowed to produce seeds, or rhizomes. These weeds can be spread into new areas by domesticated animals and mulches used for erosion control. Verifying that animal feed and mulch is weed free before it is used in an area can prevent the spread of weeds. Prevention programs are much simpler and cheaper than detection, control, or eradication programs for weeds that are already established.

After the final approval of the Sierra Nevada Framework, lands under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service will close to those not using Certified Weed Free Forage; and it is expected that Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service will follow suit. The closure has a three-year timeline: the first season (tentatively 2000) there will be implementation of a certification and education about what the closure means for land users. The second year, enforcement will be limited to warnings to those not in compliance. The third year, total enforcement will occur.

The California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CACASA) formed a Weed Free Forage Committee California to develop and implement a weed free certification program which will comply with Weed Free Forage requirements on Federal Lands in the Sierra Nevada. Materials included in this program are: hay, grains, straw, and mulch. The committee has to date adopted procedures for certifying forage as “weed-free”. They are currently working on documentation procedures. Finalizing the certification program should happen at the Spring Conference of the California Agricultural Commissioners.

Montana started its Noxious Seed Free Forage Program in 1972. Since then, the idea has spread, and now almost all the Western States have or are working on Weed Free Forage certification programs. Several states also have closures to non-certified forage applied on Federal lands. Colorado has additionally closed lands managed by its Department of Wildlife to non-certified forage.

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