

California Department of Food and Agriculture's Regulated Noxious Weed Programs

Carri Pirosko¹ and Courtney Albrecht², California Department of Food and Agriculture

¹ Associate Agricultural Biologist, Integrated Pest Control Branch, 37490 Toronto Ave., Burney CA 96013, cpirosko@cdfa.ca.gov

² Senior Agricultural Biologist, Pest Exclusion Branch, 1220 N Street, Sacramento CA 95814, calbrecht@cdfa.ca.gov

The Mission of the California Department of Food and Agriculture is to promote and protect California agriculture. This includes the prevention, introduction and spread of injurious insects or animal pests, plant diseases, and noxious weeds. The Noxious Weeds Program is authorized by the California Food and Agricultural Code, Section 403 where it states, "The Department shall prevent the introduction and spread of ... noxious weeds." The term "noxious weed" is defined in the code, Section 5004 as "any species of plant which is, or is liable to be, detrimental or destructive and difficult to control or eradicate." USDA/APHIS, CDFA Exterior (border stations), and CDFA Interior (CDFA biologists) and County Agricultural Commissioners share responsibility in regulating noxious weeds at California's borders, as well as within the state.

An Action-Oriented Pest Rating System provides guidance from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to county and state agricultural inspectors on regulatory actions to take when a plant pest is detected or intercepted in trade or in the environment. Under the system, plant pests are assigned a rating (A, B, C, D, or Q). The rating designates the recommended regulatory action, ranging from eradication and containment to release at the discretion of the county agricultural commissioner. Although not codified as a law, the Plant Pest Rating System is a policy that enables the Department to carry out laws intended to protect California's agriculture against pests.

A procedure is in place to change a pest rating and includes the following steps and guidelines: (1) "Q" pests to be reviewed every year, (2) a request can come from any interested person to change an existing "A", "B", "C" or "D", (3) a Pest Study Team is convened to review new requests, (4) supporting documentation is review by the team, (5) other affected agencies are consulted, (6) A new rating is proposed to County Agricultural Commissioner's and a 30-day comment period follows, and lastly (7) a final rating is published.

The Department has a proven track record with A-rated statewide noxious weed eradications. Thirteen A-rated weeds have been eradicated from the state entirely: whitestem distaff thistle (*Carthamus leucocaulos*), dudaim melon (*Cucumis melo* L. var. *dudaim*), giant dodder (*Cuscuta reflexa*), serrate spurge (*Euphorbia serrata*), Russian salt tree (*Halimodendron halodendron*), blueweed (*Helianthus ciliaris*), tanglehead (*Heteropogon contortus*), creeping mesquite (*Prosopis strombulifera*), southern meadow sage (*Salvia virgata*), heartleaf nightshade (*Solanum cardiophyllum*), Austrian peaweed (*Sphaerophysa salsula*), wild marigold (*Tagetes minuta*), and Syrian beancaper (*Zygophyllum fabago*). In addition, several A-rated noxious weeds are approaching statewide eradication: golden thistle, *Scolymus hispanicus* (zer o-few plants in Alameda County), perennial sowthistle, *Sonchus arvensis* (small sites in Modoc and Santa Barbara Counties), long-leaf groundcherry, *Physalis longifolia* (small sites in Siskiyou County), Taurian thistle, *Onopordum tauricum* (small sites in Siskiyou and Monterey Counties), Illyrian

thistle, *Onopordum illyricum* (zero-few plants in Santa Clara County), and camelthorn, *Alhagi maurorum* (only 1 site in Inyo County). Examples of County/Regional Eradications of A-rated noxious weeds include: hydrilla, *hydrilla verticillata* from eleven Counties and Scotch thistle, *Onopordum acanthium* from twelve Counties.

California has a unique and coordinated noxious weed program/system with a long history. District Biologist and County Agricultural Commissioner's Offices are out there working A-rated Noxious Weed populations to eradication. Eradication of incipient populations of A-rated Noxious Weeds is possible. Continued successes are tallied each year.