Ragwort Policy



The purpose of this policy is to underline the ways in which Ragwort (Senecio jacobaea) will be managed on land maintained by FX Plus and the reasons for this.

Ragwort is covered by the Weeds Act 1959 (which specifies five injurious weeds including common ragwort) and the Ragwort Control Act 2003.

Ragwort is a native UK plant which can pose a danger to health, mainly of livestock, while also being critically important to maintaining biodiversity, and so it is clear that a reasoned approach is needed.

**Risks posed by Ragwort**

Ragwort contains toxins which can have debilitating or fatal consequences, if eaten by horses and other grazing animals. While these animals know to avoid the plant when grazing, it becomes a problem when dried and mixed in with hay or other winter feed.

Humans may be at risk from ragwort poisoning through direct contact (e.g. hand pulling) or the consumption of contaminated food. However, according to a report by FERA, current evidence suggests that risks to human health are low to negligible.

**Importance of Ragwort to biodiversity**

According to FERA: thirty eight species of insect are dependent on ragwort or have a limited number of alternative hosts, and are therefore likely to be significantly affected by changes to ragwort populations. These include several nationally scarce species and the cinnabar moth, a Biodiversity Action Plan species whose primary host is ragwort and which has declined by 83% in the last 35 years.

Several studies have concluded that ragwort is also an important source of nectar and pollen for a range of pollinating insects. One review reports 178 species (including 47 bee species and 35 hoverfly species) to have been recorded visiting ragwort flowers.

**Method of spread of plant**

Ragwort spreads by dispersal of its seed, which is very small and can be carried by the wind. Most seeds are shed close to the plant, with median dispersal distances ranging from around 0.5 to 2 metres, but a very small proportion disperse over a longer distance.

For this reason Defra give the following three categories to describe the risk of spread:

High Risk:

• Ragwort is present and flowering/seeding within 50m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production

Medium Risk:

• Ragwort is present within 50m to 100m of the above

Low Risk:

• Ragwort or the land on which it is present is more than 100m from the above

These categories may be affected by factors such as prevailing winds, topography, shelter belts, hedges and other natural barriers to seed dispersal.

**Control of Ragwort**

Current best practice in control of Ragwort as stated by Defra is as follows:

Where a high risk is identified – take immediate action to control the spread of ragwort using an appropriate control technique taking account of the status of the land

Where a medium risk is identified – establish a control policy to ensure that where a change from a medium to a high risk of spread can be anticipated, it is identified and dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

Where a low risk is identified – no immediate action is required

Methods of control include hand pulling (using appropriate PPE to minimise risk to staff), mowing/strimming and treatment with herbicide. The method used in each instance will depend on the situation.

**Conclusion**

On land managed by FX Plus, Grounds staff will prevent Ragwort seeding within 50m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production, and will take care that plants within 50-100m cannot be predicted to pose a realistic risk of spread. All other plants on land managed by FX Plus will be free from control.

**Sources**

Defra - Code of Practice on How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/525269/pb9840-cop-ragwort-rev.pdf](https://mailspace.falmouth.ac.uk/owa/redir.aspx?C=bimVzsjT_GiuQWS-HcemJUHukYnza8oMHY6B9niV9w7CffdcxtPWCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2fgovernment%2fuploads%2fsystem%2fuploads%2fattachment_data%2ffile%2f525269%2fpb9840-cop-ragwort-rev.pdf)

Fera - Review of evidence concerning ragwort impacts ecology and control options

[http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=12217\_Reviewofevidenceconcerningragwortimpactsecologyandcontroloptions.pdf](https://mailspace.falmouth.ac.uk/owa/redir.aspx?C=joHJkfz6AVg6llSI0ClxDL2jJ0MgMGqASdw51KClWMTCffdcxtPWCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2frandd.defra.gov.uk%2fDocument.aspx%3fDocument%3d12217_Reviewofevidenceconcerningragwortimpactsecologyandcontroloptions.pdf)