

**Weekly Ag Report**  
**Tom Getts, UCCE Weed and Crops Advisor**  
**November 18, 2015**

Morning, this is your weekly Ag Report. I'm Tom Getts with the Lassen County Cooperative Extension office and I am going to talk about dispersal.

How do plants move around? They have roots not legs, and can't exactly amble across the landscape. Or can they? As an individual no, they can't walk about. Once they germinate they are stuck growing in the same spot wherever it may be. However plants have numerous ways to get their offspring across the landscape, which is referred to as seed dispersal. Plants have evolved many different strategies to accomplish this, with weeds and crops being some of the best!

Plants use the wind to disperse their seeds. The first one that comes to my mind is the iconic dandelion with its small seeds dangling from the fluffy white pappuses drifting off into the wind. Many plants have small seeds that can be blown on the wind, thistles, salsify, prickly lettuce, cottonwood trees, sometimes short distances, but sometimes long. Which is how they can pop up on your property out of nowhere. Then there are tumble weeds, like Russian thistle, tumble mustard and kochia. They grow into roundish shapes and break off at the base when they mature. The wind blows them across the landscape scattering thousands of seeds about in their wake.

Plants also utilize water for seed distribution. Many seeds float and can be carried by rivers or irrigation canals over long distances. This is a great strategy for plants that need large quantities of water to grow, because if water brought them there, water will often flow there again. Unfortunately, undesirable plants often grow next to waterways and the irrigation water you use could be sowing weeds into your fields. So do your downstream neighbor a favor and control the weeds around your ditches.

Animals are utilized by plants willingly and unwillingly to distribute their seeds. Cheat grass and cocklebur get caught in the fur of wild and domestic animals. Where the animal goes, the seed hitchhikes across the landscape, hoping it falls off in a good spot. Other plants have a different strategy, producing seeds that can be eaten and still be viable after passing through the digestive tracks of livestock, deer, bears, or birds!

Humans are some of the best seed dispersal mechanisms, we move seeds around, on our shoes, and in our trucks. Heck we can just hop on a plane and move seeds to another continent, which is where some of the worst weeds came from! With weeds this movement is unintentional, but with other plants it is not. Think about the last time you ate a peach, at the end of it there was a seed. That seed had been dispersed by us a long way from the tree. Or how about when you bought a bag of wheat seed? Crops have a brilliant dispersal strategy! We do backbreaking work creating perfect growing conditions, then we pamper them with extra water and nutrients throughout their life. Given then we eat them, but we do spend a lot of time dispersing their seeds, and ensuring their survival!

Another way that plants can disperse their seeds, is not just through space, but throughout time. Seeds can sit in the soil staying dormant, just waiting for conditions to be right. But that is another story.

So check your dog, and your shoes, so you are not the dispersal mechanism of weeds onto your property. And scout for weeds every once in a while, just because you didn't bring them in, doesn't mean they didn't get dropped in by a bird, or the wind!

To end this week, I have an announcement: Lassen County's Strategic Weed Action Team, better known as SWAT, will be hosting a free workshop, Basics of Integrated Weed Management. It will be held at 6:30 pm, December 8<sup>th</sup>, at the historic Rail Road Depot, here in Susanville. The workshop will cover tools for identification, understanding biology for improving control, general control methods, and highlight how to control some common weeds here in Lassen County. I hope to see you there!