

Weekly Ag Report
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Morning Lassen County, this is Tom Getts down at the Extension Office with your Weekly Ag Report. Tui chub are still roaming the shallows of Eagle Lake and the diving birds are feasting. Fall is here!

A couple of months ago the Ag Report was focused on a new weed in the area: myrtle spurge. This plant is a low growing perennial with bluish-green foliage and waxy leaves. It is a new invader to the state, and currently is only found in limited locations. We might be able to eradicate it now if people are vigilant. If you want to know more, visit the Cooperative Extension website, I recently released a newsletter which has an article focusing on myrtle spurge.

If you caught the Ag Report a couple of weeks ago, Cheryl Lauritsen, from the Ag Commissioner's Office, described how certain perennial weeds, such as Russian knapweed, can be effectively controlled in the fall. I wanted to piggyback on that Ag Report, and let you know myrtle spurge is another weed where fall treatments of herbicide can be effective. Mechanical removal can be effective as well, but be careful, the milky sap of myrtle spurge can cause contact dermatitis!

Speaking of Russian knapweed, there was a biocontrol insect recently released right here in Lassen County. You might be asking, what is a biocontrol insect? Well, that takes a little explaining. Invasive weeds are plants introduced from other continents, which outcompete our native plants. It is only a small portion of introduced plants which are hyper competitive in our climate and become invasive weeds.

One of the theories why these introduced plants are more competitive than the native plants, is when they make the journey over the ocean, they leave behind their natural predators. These predators can be anything that damages the plant, from insects that actively eat the plant, to fungus that grow on the roots. Biocontrol agents are the organisms found in the home range of the introduced plant, which are then brought here and released to feed on the invasive weeds. Biocontrol agents are not just brought over willy nilly. In fact, there is a very rigorous testing program to make sure the organisms brought over are host specific, and will only feed upon the invasive weed.

Well, what does all this have to do with Lassen County? Over the past few years, the California Department of Food and Agriculture has been trying to establish a biocontrol agent for Russian knapweed. It is a gall wasp (*Aulacidea Acrtiltonica*) which lays eggs on the stems of Russian knapweed in the spring. Eggs hatch and galls are formed creating malformed stems, which reduce the vigor of the plants, and can prevent seed production. They won't eliminate the Russian knapweed, but having these wasps out there feeding on Russian knapweed, theoretically will help reduce the spread. This gall wasp has already been established in other parts of the country infested by Russian knapweed, such as Montana and Colorado.

Wasps were released at three locations within Lassen County earlier this spring. A few weeks ago, we went out to look at the sites and we found the wasp's galls at two of the three release locations. This is great news, as previous releases in other parts of the state were not successful. Hopefully the wasps are able to overwinter, and spread next year!

I want to end this Ag Report with a caveat. While biocontrol insects may be part of a long term integrated approach to invasive species management, it is not a short-term solution. We have plenty of Russian knapweed to go around, so if you own a patch of it, get out there and treat it this fall!