Ventenata control strategies found for forage producers

The Situation
Ventenata dubia, commonly referred to as wiregrass, has become a serious problem for perennial forage producers in the Pacific Northwest. Ventenata is a winter annual grass that germinates in the fall, a few weeks after downy brome (cheatgrass). Pastures and hayfields that become infested with Ventenata will have significant yield reductions of 50% or more within a few growing seasons. Ventenata is not palatable to livestock, in part, because it has nearly the same amount of silica as medusahead wildrye. With loss of productivity, land condition and land value declines. Recently, the export market for Timothy hay was valued at around $350 per ton. However, Timothy hay that contains Ventenata is unsuitable for export leaving farmers only a local market at about $150 per ton. Ventenata is difficult to control using common weed management strategies and has seriously impacted forage producers by reducing forage yield and quality throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Our Response
A multi-state effort is underway to address Ventenata control. Partners include: the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); Latah County Soil and Water Conservation District; Latah and Benewah County farmers and ranchers; County Weed Superintendents from Asotin and Pend Oreille Counties in Washington; and Washington State University (WSU) and University of Idaho (UI) Extension faculty and specialists. Two publications have been written including a WSU extension bulletin and a NRCS Plant Guide.

Eight Ventenata infested sites were identified and designated as test plots for herbicide and fertilization treatments. Field experiments were conducted and results were shared at 3 conferences, 4 field tours, and through two publications by NRCS and WSU. In addition, NRCS personnel surveys added to our understanding of the scope of the problem.

Program Outcomes
Eight experiments showed that the active ingredient imazapic (5 oz/A product, Plateau or Panoramic) is effective in the fall just after Ventenata emerges. Another chemical, Journey, proved effective at a rate of 13 oz/A. Each of these products reduces growth of desirable forage grasses in the following spring and summer but fall growth returns to normal.

In addition, results showed that the chemical Outrider at 0.75 to 1 oz/Acre product is effective when applied in the fall. These herbicides worked well under different management systems. Outrider could be used in CRP and other non-crop uses only.

Ventenata control in Timothy hay will require additional research because of potential Timothy injury from herbicides. Several herbicides show promise and new options may become available after studies are conducted in 2010.
In pastures where Ventenata comprises a small component of the forage area, the pasture should be grazed in summer or fall to remove standing biomass in order to increase the herbicide contact on emerging winter annual grasses.

The Future
A follow-up seed bank study has been initiated to determine the duration of treatment needed to control Ventenata. In addition, field studies resulted in the initiation of a decision support tool for use by farmers and ranchers in managing Ventenata.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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