

Eastern Oregon Wheat League Report and Recommendations of the Weed Control and Soil Erosion Committee

Heppner, Oregon, December 4-5, 1936

The extent of weed infestation has reached such a point that the possibility of widespread control measures is definitely beyond the reach of the individual farmer. The following counties are seriously concerned with the increase of this infestation: Malheur, Baker, Wallowa, Union, Umatilla, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler, Deschutes, Crook, Klamath and possible others. This committee is not particularly familiar with the weed situation in western Oregon, and does not attempt to speak for conditions prevailing therein, but it is known that weed infestation in the areas west of the Cascade mountains in Oregon is very heavy in many places. It has been stated that 25 per cent of the tillable area of some Oregon counties will be infested with perennial noxious weeds within the next ten to twenty years, and that present methods of control will cost more than the land is worth if positive steps are taken toward reclamation.

Public lands infested with weeds are a special problem. It has been noted that the spread of some of these weeds has been particularly bad on lands adjacent to roads and within the highway rights-of-way, due to the fact that construction and maintenance methods that are now practiced tend to spread the weeds for considerable distances along the highways. In irrigated areas, it is known that a serious spread of weeds is occasioned by the operation of irrigation canals, particularly where seeds are allowed to ripen and be deposited in the irrigation water at points near the head of the diversion system.

Careful determination of areas infested by noxious weeds reveals the astounding conclusion that there are between 29,000 and 30,000 acres of such lands in the eleven counties of eastern Oregon included in the activities of the Eastern Oregon Wheat League. Further investigation shows that prior to the depression farmers had used 750,000 pounds of weed killing chemicals of one kind and another. When prices for agricultural commodities became substantially lowered, it was impossible for these purchases to be maintained with a view to destroying weeds. The result has been a fairly rapid expansion of areas of farm land infested by noxious weeds. This has brought about a situation serious not only to landowners and operators, but to the entire population of the areas involved.

The weeds causing most of the difficulty are as a rule deep-rooted and exhibit extreme persistence. Since many of them are of a perennial nature, they cannot be destroyed by ordinary tillage operations upon a practical basis. Many of these weeds are characterized by creeping, underground stems or root stocks which spread through the soil in all directions, sprouting vigorously at the joints, and resisting all but the most persistent efforts toward extermination.

We recommend that existing legislation in connection with noxious weeds in the State of Oregon be amended to provide for more adequate control of noxious weeds, and that such legislation be enforced to the fullest extent. This has particular reference to the Oregon Seed Law, and your committee urges that an amendment be made to the existing law which will bring within the scope of the law all sales made by dealers or growers, with the provision that such sales bear a certificate of purity by the Federal Seed Testing laboratory, a branch of which is maintained at ETAINET which is located in the Oregon State College at Corvallis. Provision should be made to enforce such law if and when it becomes an Oregon statute. Your committee further recommends that this portion of the report be referred to the legislative committee of the Eastern Oregon Wheat League with the recommendation that the committee, assisted

by a representative of the proper department of the State Agricultural College, proceed to prepare such weed law and to present it to the Oregon State legislature when next in session.

Your committee further recommends that the Eastern Oregon Wheat League, through its weed committee, take immediate steps to interest all agricultural organizations, county courts of the Eastern Oregon Wheat League district, state planning boards, service clubs, chambers of commerce, and others, in a weed control program. We pledge the support of the Eastern Oregon counties of any proper plan that may be developed, but urge haste in order that advantage may be taken of federal funds now available, or that may become available. It is our opinion that the noxious weed control program might properly be carried either as a WPA project, or as an agricultural relief measure.

It is the further opinion of your committee that the financing of this work should largely be a federal responsibility. However, it might be advantageous for the state, county and individual to bear a portion of this expense. What we now need is an actual eradication program.

It is the opinion of your committee that the control of noxious weeds, such as wild morning glory, white top, Canadian thistle, Russian knapweed, and others, is fully as important as soil erosion control, the expanded activities of the United States Forest Service, and other conservation movements as a part of a permanent national policy.

Your committee believes that the value of all property, both public and private, depends upon, and their values vary directly with, the control of noxious weeds in agricultural districts.

We recommend an accurate survey showing size and location of noxious weed infestations in each county under the direction of the county courts. We suggest that these survey projects be handled as WPA projects for the reason that no material would be necessary, and that much of the cost would be for labor. This recommendation should be properly presented to county budgeting committees in order that funds may be included in county budgets.

It is believed to be a very desirable recommendation which should receive widespread attention that where no other program of control or eradication is in effect weed patches should be seeded to permanent grasses for the effective control which results from such practices.

Serious consideration should be given to the cleaning of all machinery operated over weed infested areas before moving from the infested field.

County courts should, in the opinion of the committee, own and operate equipment designed for the most effective control of weeds coming under the scope of this report. Attention should be called to the desirability of fencing weed patches where that is necessary to prevent any type of spread.

The Eastern Oregon Wheat League should lend its influence in providing legislation which in effect will prevent the moving of hay, straw, chaff or any other crop from a field infested with perennial noxious weeds unless such products be removed to another field already infested. The movement of livestock from perennial noxious weed-infested areas should be done with the utmost care and under conditions which will prevent the spread of weeds.

It is recommended that there be developed a most intensive educational campaign to the end that there may be an immediate and widespread attack upon the weed problem and its solution. The committee believes that farmers should be urged

to organize county weed associations or make use of other existing organized groups for the purpose of furthering this educational campaign.

(a) This campaign should include the dissemination of information regarding the various methods by which weeds may be spread and best methods for control.

(b) Farmers should be given every assistance in learning to identify weeds in their respective districts.

(c) There is need to convince farmers of their definite responsibility with relation to weeds on lands which they farm.

Of first consideration is the need for immediate action aimed at actual control of weeds now on farms. It is recommended that the Eastern Oregon Wheat League and farmers in the respective counties take immediate steps to secure WPA projects having for their objective the control of weeds within the counties.

It is universally conceded that one of the greatest obstacles in the way of greater farmer activity with weed control is the extremely high cost of chemicals used for these purposes. Your committee believes that this problem is of such great economic importance and so intimately involves the future of the agriculture of this nation as to make it proper for the government of these United States immediately to begin to give consideration to the use of its facilities to produce herbicides in order that costs may be brought reasonably within the reach of farmers. This latter we consider a most vital point. It is particularly recommended that a well-qualified committee of one or more persons present this proposition to Congress in the most effective manner possible. By all means federal authorities should remove the tariff from imported weed chemicals and from any materials which may be compounded for that purpose.

Your committee recommends necessary action to bring about legislation providing for the lowering of taxes upon weed infested areas upon a sliding scale which gives consideration to the amount expended upon the land and the degree to which the work is successful in controlling the weeds.

Your committee believes it to be desirable that county courts declare county-wide weed districts and set up the necessary organization to put the Oregon weed law into effect, specifically covering such weeds as wild morning glory, Russian knapweed, white top, Canadian thistle, and any other which may properly come under the act.

It should be widely recommended that farmers do not use tillage methods which result in the spread of weeds except when such tillage is a part of an approved control program. The proper officials should be urged to control perennial noxious weeds along county roads, state highways, and city streets. The spread of weeds by highway maintenance equipment is earnestly deplored.

SOIL CONSERVATION.

In referring particularly to the soil conservation angle of the committee's report, the following is submitted:

1. We recommend the use of such farming methods as will permit the largest possible return to the soil of crop residues, such as straw, etc., particular attention being given to leaving such residues upon the surface of the soil to the greatest possible extent consistent with practical farm methods.

2. Your committee believes that attention should be given to an organized attack upon the land use problem. Among other things, this involves the taking out of cultivation those lands subject to excessive erosion, those lands of such low yields as to make profitable returns impossible, and those small, broken areas surrounded by or adjacent to good grazing land which should be returned to grazing use.

3. Gully control is a vital factor of the soil conservation program. There should be attention given to grading in and seeding down of gullies, which, if left uncontrolled, will eventually become responsible for dividing large fields into small ones, thereby increasing the cost of operation, as well as being a source of

soil loss. As a further method of controlling water erosion and runoff your committee recommends that tillage and seeding operations be done on the contour.

4. County courts and state highway commission should be urged to adopt road-building and maintenance practices looking to the greatest possible elimination of the effects of erosion. The effect of any roadside drainage construction should take into consideration adjoining farm lands insofar as they may be affected by head erosion and gully formation.

5. Your committee believes there should be a vigorous program of education intended to convince the farmer of his individual responsibility in connection with the erosion control or other soil conservation problem on his farm. There is a feeling that too many are waiting for the government to take care of these problems.

6. To check the further introduction and scattering of weeds it is important that nothing but clean seed be used in erosion control plantings.

7. Useful water is of first importance as an agricultural factor. Your committee believes that use should be made of every possible agency looking to the construction of small earth dams and other types of reservoirs to hold water supplies for building up the soil moisture. There should be protection of reservoirs against the effects of erosion, which ultimately leads to the complete silting in of such storage basins. Attention to proper farm management methods, giving due consideration to the utilization of crop residues

and proper grazing methods, offers by far the most effective and widespread check against silting in of reservoirs.

8. Complete information should be supplied all communities in order that they may be advised regarding the possibilities of obtaining assistance in setting up and operating erosion control activities on an organized basis. This service is now available to those requesting it.

9. To those in positions of responsibility in these connections, attention should be called to the intimate relationship between weed control and soil conservation, and your committee believes that the Eastern Oregon Wheat League can properly recommend the greatest possible degree of consolidation of these various activities.

Your committee on weeds and soil conservation further recommends that the Eastern Oregon Wheat League urge upon the county courts of the counties represented therein, the advisability of setting up revolving funds within their counties, the same to be used under such rules as the said courts may prescribe for the control and eradication of noxious weeds, soil conservation and erosion. It is further recommended that the county courts be presented with copies of this recommendation.

Your committee endorses the proposed law to control erosion and the formation of erosion districts.

Sylvannus Wright was among Lexington folk here Monday on business.

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