County Weed Manager Certified to Inspect Weed-Free Forage

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Deschutes Countyâ€™s Weed Manager, Dan Sherwin, is participating in a statewide pilot program to improve the quality of hay and straw in Central Oregon. The voluntary fee based program allows Sherwin to inspect and certify local hay and straw fields for noxious weeds. The primary goal of the program is to prevent noxious weeds from growing on public lands and to give added value to hay and straw grown in Central Oregon.

The program was started by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). Besides the primary goal of preventing noxious weeds spreading on public land, the hay and straw will be used for fire rehabilitation (erosion and seed germination after wild land forest fires) on public lands. In the past after a wildfire, straw that contained noxious weed seeds was distributed on public lands and the lands became infected.

Sherwin says Oregon and Washington are the only two states that do not have a Weed Free Forage Program in the Northwest, and says he started a Weed Free Program in Wallowa County in 2003. With Sherwin being certified for weed-free forage in the Central Oregon region, he frees up the other certifier so he/she may continue certifying on the west side of the mountains, saving time, money and resources for taxpayers.

With an increased demand in Oregon and throughout western states for certified weed-free hay and straw, ODA is hoping an inspection and certification program will help Oregon forage producers command a better price for their product.

Participating agricultural growers can request to have ODA inspect their hay or straw fields for noxious weeds. A certificate of inspection will be completed and given to the applicant for each field inspected found free of noxious weeds. Standards are consistent with those established by the North American Weed Management Association (www.nawma.com) . The certificate will ensure the forage crop is free from seed and plant parts of listed noxious weeds in Oregon.

The Weed-Free Forage program is the beginning of a certification program in the State, while many other states have already started similar programs. The Weed-Free Forage program operated last year on a trial basis in Umatilla County.

â€œIn the future, other countries may turn to the Pacific Northwest for certified hay because they will want to prevent the spread of noxious weeds in their country as well,â€• Sherwin says.

Fields or crop cuttings that fail to meet weed-free standards can be treated through burning, cutting, rouging, mechanical methods, chemicals, or other treatment methods whereupon a follow-up inspection can be requested.

Growers interested in participating in the Statewide weed-free forage certification pilot program should contact the Oregon Department of Agricultureâ€™s Commodity Inspection Division at (503) 986-4620.

Growers in Central Oregon can call Deschutes County Weed Inspector Dan Sherwin at 322-7135 for more information about the Weed-Free Forage Program.

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