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## The Feasibility of Alternative Rural Enterprises Course

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Agricultural producers know there are few things more risky than taking on a new enterprise in their business.

The ability to select, plan, and evaluate new and existing business enterprises is an increasingly important skill to help reduce business risk. Online resources are available to help evaluate and select these alternative enterprises. One is a course from RightRisk.org. Click on the Products link, and then go to Rural Enterprise Feasibility.

The *Feasibility of Alternative Rural Enterprises Course* presents a step-by-step approach to defining an agricultural enterprise, setting goals and planning for success, and evaluating and managing the risks.

### Defining the enterprise and deciding where you want to go

The course begins by defining agricultural and rural enterprises. Enterprises are generally defined as activities that generate distinct saleable goods or services. This usually means activities that combine limited resources (dollars or inputs) to generate revenue with at least some risk involved. Breaking down an agricultural business into individual enterprises is a great start for evaluating an existing business and determining if a new enterprise will fit.

Goal setting is performed after each enterprise is identified. Keeping goals realistic is important. Typically, goals are set to address specific problems within the enterprises. This course encourages producers to think beyond tradi-

tional production goals. More and more we see markets and incentives to produce not just raw commodities but commodities with certain characteristics or niches.

### Planning, feasibility, and risk analysis

The next section of the course involves planning and analyzing existing or planned enterprises. SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) should be performed for each enterprise. Most new businesses fail due to lack of proper planning. It are important to perform personal assessments to determine individual strengths and weaknesses for the enterprise as well as personal goals, skills, and resources needed for enterprise success.

Production feasibility is the next step. For agricultural enterprises, this

means assessing physical resources such as land, water, and equipment. It involves determining production goals and requirements, necessary borrowing, and risk management. A market assessment follows. This includes the study of potential markets and customers. This step is where financial planning is completed. Projections of income and cash flow needs by enterprise activity is important. Combining these steps, a producer can obtain a whole-farm picture of the business.

Risk analysis and management is the final lesson. It discusses different risks and risk-management strategies. The course discusses the five sources of risk: production, marketing, financial, legal, and human resource risk. Planning for and designing a management strategy for each area of risk helps ensure a better chance of success for the enterprise.

### Summary

The *Feasibility of Alternative Rural Enterprises Course* from RightRisk.org is designed to help evaluate existing or new agricultural enterprises. Content includes individual assessments at the end of each lesson as well as interactive activities to help in understanding the concepts.

For more information about risk management topics on the Web, visit the Western Risk Management Library online at <http://agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt>.

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## Late spring-early summer control a good option for several tough Wyoming weeds

By Stephen Enloe

Many weeds are emerging during May and June's mixed bag of weather and are preparing for rapid growth and reproduction.

Here is some late spring and early summer control advice for a few noxious weeds.

### Houndstongue

Houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) (Figure 1) is a biennial poisonous to grazing animals and is very competitive with grasses. Horses and cattle are the most sensitive to poisoning while sheep and goats are more tolerant. Most poisonings occur from ingesting contaminated hay. Its fruits are covered with hooked barbs (like nylon fabric fasteners) that attach to hair, fur, shoes, and clothes. It emerges as a rosette in April and May, begins to bolt in mid-May, and flowers by early June. Houndstongue does well in disturbed areas but can also invade established pastures and grasslands.

Control options include hand pulling or severing the root 3 to 4 inches below the soil surface with a shovel. The optimum time is late May to early June when plants have bolted but before flowering and seed production. The most effective herbicides for houndstongue control are metsulfuron and chlorsulfuron, which can be applied from the rosette stage until early flowering to prevent seed production. There are no approved biological control agents for houndstongue, and intensive grazing with sheep or goats is not recommended.



Figure 1. Houndstongue



Figure 2. Leafy spurge

### Leafy spurge

Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) is a creeping perennial forb (Figure 2) that is one of the worst weeds of the Northern Great Plains. It contains a latex sap that is a skin and eye irritant and greatly reduces pasture and range grass productivity. Wyoming weed and pest control districts and many ranchers and landowners have worked for years to prevent leafy spurge from taking over Wyoming.

Control is a long-term battle that requires persistence due to the plant's extensive root system with enormous regenerative potential.

There are four techniques for managing leafy spurge, including herbicides, establishing competitive perennial grasses, biological control, and sheep or goat grazing.

The most effective herbicide to apply in the spring is picloram at the true flower stage (Figure 3). Picloram can provide two to three years of control before leafy spurge regenerates from deep roots. Use this window of opportunity to seed perennial grasses suited to your soil type and



Figure 3. Leafy spurge

precipitation zone. If the timing is missed, alternatively apply imazapic (Plateau) in the fall when the stems and leaves turn reddish yellow. Do not apply imazapic in the spring to leafy spurge. It will not provide good control and may injure many perennial grasses.

If a leafy spurge problem is beyond management with herbicides, biological control with several insects, including leafy spurge flea beetles, may be a good option. The flea beetles have provided considerable suppression in many areas but will not eliminate leafy spurge. Contact a local weed and pest control district for information on how to collect or buy the insects. A listing of offices is available online at [www.wyoweed.org/wp\\_dist.html](http://www.wyoweed.org/wp_dist.html).

Sheep or goats can also be used for leafy spurge suppression. Repeated high-intensity, short-duration grazing to achieve 95 percent utilization of the leafy spurge has worked well. Grazing should begin when leafy spurge is in the vegetative to flowering stage (May through early June). Note that grazing after seed set may spread viable seed through animal movements to other areas.

### Canada thistle

Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is a spiny, creeping perennial forb (Figure 4) that infests many pastures and riparian areas. Mowing at the bolt to early bud stage repeated once or twice over the summer will prevent seed production; however, this treatment will not provide long-term control. Effective herbicides include amino-



Figure 4. Canada thistle

pyralid, clopyralid, picloram, and clopyralid + triclopyr. The optimal time is spring and early summer when Canada thistle is bolting but before the flower bud stage.



Figure 5. Spotted knapweed

### Spotted knapweed

Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) is a perennial forb (Figure 5) that has invaded more than four million acres just in Montana. Wyoming has only a few thousand acres infested, and the goal is to eradicate what we have and prevent new infestations. Since eradication is the goal, digging, hand pulling, and herbicides are the key strategies. Spotted knapweed resprouts each spring from a root crown, so getting the entire root crown is necessary for control. Spotted knapweed seed may also survive in the soil for seven to 10 years. Expect a new flush of rosettes after hand pulling. All of the herbicides recommended for Canada thistle are also very effective for spotted knapweed. The optimal application time is in the late rosette to bolting stage. Do not wait until late summer to treat since preventing seed production is critical to preventing spread.

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