

News Column for Use Week of 11/25/19
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Now is the Time to Mark Pastures Infested with Old World Bluestems

Old world bluestems are continuing to spread and cause issues for pastures in the Midwest. During a meeting in Manhattan, Kansas this summer, there was discussion of implementing a plan that would quarantine old world bluestem grasses. There is much debate around the quarantine and other plans were proposed such as adding them to the noxious weed list, but this shows how big of a problem these grasses have become.

During the winter months, old world bluestems are easy to spot as they are much lighter in color (like straw) compared to our native grasses. If you see areas that do contain a grass that is lighter in color, it would be wise to take a closer look to identify the grass. Once you have identified the grass as an old world bluestem, treatments need to be done in the spring. However, now is the time to prepare for spring treatments.

My recommendation for these old world bluestem patches is to mark them after cattle are removed with flags or with posts. The reason for this is once spring comes back around and you go out to spray these patches, you may not find them as easily. The grasses can be identified in the spring, but it is more difficult to do so.

There are two chemical treatments shown to work on old world bluestems in Kansas. The first is with glyphosate and the second is with imazapyr. When using glyphosate, apply one to two pound per acre when the plants have around four or five leaves. A second application of one to two pounds per acre needs to be done eight weeks later or when the plant begins early heading. The same timing needs to be applied when using imazapyr products, but it only needs to be applied at a quarter-pound to a half-pound per acre. Prior to application of these chemicals, it's a good idea to burn, mow, or intensively graze these areas to get new plant growth which will aide in the herbicide treatment.

Keith Harmony at Kansas State Agricultural Research Center in Hays says, "To mitigate the likelihood of getting old world bluestem, if reseeding an area to grass, you should ensure the seed company you use is a dealer that keeps track of the plant." It is important companies are free of these old world bluestem seeds in their production systems; seed contamination is a form of spreading the grass when reseeding the ground.

Another possible point of contamination is feeding hay. Harmony warned against feeding hay with old world bluestem in pastures without the grass. Hay produced from grasses that grow along the ditches often contains old world bluestem. Hay from some states have a higher likelihood of having old world bluestem as well. Southern states such as Texas and Oklahoma are more likely to have traces of the plant.

If you need help identifying old world bluestems, please contact Brett Melton at the Concordia Extension Office by calling 785-243-8185 or by emailing bmelton@ksu.edu.