



**Weed Free Forage Toolkit**  
for participating counties

*December 2022*

# Alberta Invasive Species Council's Weed Free Forage Toolkit:

## Executive Summary:

The Alberta Invasive Species Council (AISC) is a not-for-profit society dedicated to informing and educating Albertans about the destructive impacts invasive species have on our environment, economy and society. The AISC intends to revitalize and promote the Weed Free Forage Program in Alberta, to reduce the introduction and spread of invasive species in the province, as well as to encourage producers and municipalities to participate in the program, to create a network of certified weed free forage buyers and sellers, and to increase more weed free forage on the market. This toolkit will allow participating municipalities to be thoughtful and strategic in their efforts to participate, promote and support this program in Alberta.

## Background:

Invasive species are a major threat to Alberta's economy and environment. They can take over native ecosystems, threaten biodiversity, upset trophic systems and can have monumental economic costs both through control costs and agricultural yield losses. A 2004 report suggests that invasive species cost Albertans \$1 billion each year (McClay et al.). Preventing the introduction of invasive species before they establish is the single most effective way to manage them. Contaminated hay is one-way invasive plants are spread across the province, between provinces and around the world. To address this, the [North American Invasive Species Management Association](#) (NAISMA) has set industry guidelines and maintains minimum standards for certified weed-free products, which are recognized across North America.

Forage is often contaminated with invasive species and thus, weed free forage is growing in demand but is ironically increasingly difficult to find. The AISC intends to fill an important gap by revitalizing and coordinating the existing Alberta Weed Free Forage Program. The AISC received a Canadian Agriculture Partnership Grant in 2020 to facilitate this revitalization, since then we have worked to train Certified Weed Free Forage Inspectors and reinstate all administrative components of the program. We are now working hard to promote Certified Weed Free Forage to targeted buyers and sellers, resulting in more weed-free forage on the market in Alberta.

This program has all the pieces in place to succeed once the supply and demand of Certified Weed Free Forage begins. If producers are interested in having their forage certified weed-free, the field doesn't have to be completely weed-free. Weed Free Forage Inspectors have the authority to certify portions of fields or even fields with weeds present, provided that no invasive plant propagules (flowers, seed heads, root fragments) will enter the baled forage. Inspections must be conducted within ten days maximum prior to cutting, if the crop is not cut within that timeline, a new inspection must be conducted to certify the forage as weed-free.

If your county is participating in the Weed Free Forage Program and you are a municipal Weed Inspector, please consider becoming a certified weed free forage inspector. As well, if your county is not participating, consider contacting the AISC to find out more and join as a participating municipality or county. The AISC offers free training to all municipal Weed Inspectors to become certified.

To purchase Certified Weed Free Forage, please contact the AISC (587 999 0954) for information and a list of producers within the province.

## Objectives:

This program strives to provide Albertans with knowledge and skills to certify their forage as weed-free and market it to buyers. Protecting Alberta's ecosystems and landscapes from invasive species transported through forage products can be supported through increased awareness by the public, stakeholders and partners across the province. This project will raise awareness as well as provide tools on the Certified Weed Free Forage Program in Alberta.

### 1. Key messages:

- a. The Certified Weed Free Forage Program is currently being revitalized in Alberta. This is the only Canadian province with this program in place.
- b. Contaminated forage is a common way invasive species are spread across the province, between provinces and across North America.
- c. Certified forage has gone through an inspection by a Certified Weed Free Forage Inspector, under the Alberta Weed Control Act, and must maintain minimum standards set by the North American Invasive Species Association (NAISMA).
- d. Certified Weed Free Forage is a value-added product.

### 2. Ready-to-use content:

- a. Newsletter article for participating counties:
  - i. *Hay* you! Are you a producer of weed free forage in your county? Better yet, would you like to be?!

Invasive species such as terrestrial invasive plants are detrimental to Alberta's environment and can cost an estimated \$1 billion each year. Contaminated hay is one means by which invasive plants are spread. To address this, the North American Invasive Weed Management Association has set industry guidelines and maintains minimum standards for Certified Weed Free products in Alberta, which are recognized across North America. As a participating county, we intend to promote this program to potential buyers and help producers certify and sell their Certified Weed Free Forage!

It's *twine* to get your fields inspected! Here are some guidelines for forage producers that are interested in inspections to certify their forage as weed free:

-Be *grain*-ful there's certified inspectors to help! Inspections must be conducted by a Certified Weed Free Forage Inspector with authority under the Weed Control Act (e.g.,

Weed Inspectors) within 10 days maximum prior to harvest. If the crop is not cut within that timeline, a new inspection must be conducted.

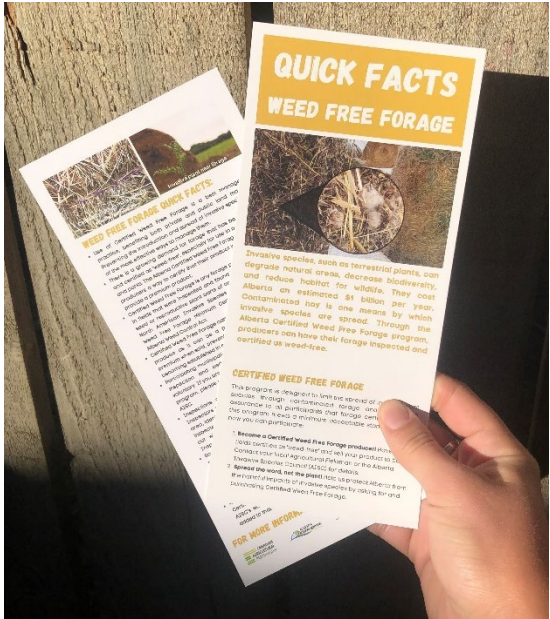
-Inspectors may certify all or a portion of a field as weed free so it's not *too much* to handle.

-It's not the *last straw* if invasive species are present, a field can be certified as weed free if there are no propagative plant parts present.

-Now you can rest and *hit the hay*, the Alberta Invasive Species Council (AISC) will take care of the rest! They maintain a publicly available list of contact information for producers with inventory of Certified Weed Free Forage. This list is updated frequently and can be found on their website, [abinvasives.ca](http://abinvasives.ca). **Please let us know if you would like to be added to that list.**

Let's get this *bale* rolling and protect Alberta from the harmful impacts of invasive species by letting others know about Alberta's Weed Free Forage program! For more information on how to get your field inspected, contact your local Agriculture Fieldmen, your local municipality at ##### or email the AISC at [info@abinvasives.ca](mailto:info@abinvasives.ca).

b. Weed Free Forage [Rack Card](#) – contact AISC for stock:



c. Weed Free Forage Stickers – contact AISC for stock:



- d. Social media posts (x4):
- i. Contaminated hay is one-way #invasiveplants are spread across the province, between provinces and around the world! The County/MD of ### is one of twenty municipalities that participate in the Alberta Certified Weed Free Forage Program! Check out more info at <https://abinvasives.ca/resources/certified-weed-free-forage/>
  - ii. Are you a producer interested in having your forage certified as weed-free? #DYK your field doesn't have to be completely weed-free? Certified Inspectors have the authority to certify portions of fields or even fields with weeds present, provided that no invasive plant propagules (flowers, seed heads, root fragments) will enter the baled forage!
  - iii. I spy with my little eye, something that looks #invasive! If you're interested in certifying your forage as weed-free, give your county's Certified Inspector a call! They are required to:
    - Inspect a crop within 10 days of harvest, if crop is not cut within 10 days, a new inspection must be conducted
    - Certify all OR a portion of a field as 'weed-free'
    - Certify a field as weed-free as long as there are no propagative plant parts present (flowers, seed heads, root fragments)
  - iv. Although you might be able to fix anything with baler twine, you can't Certified Weed Free Forage with just any twine!  
Producers must use specialized blue and orange twine for marking their bales as certified. Baled product must then be stored and transported separately from non-certified forage to maintain weed-free status. The County/MD of ### is participating in the Alberta Certified Weed Free Forage Program and can help you inspect, certify and provide details on twine for your forage – contact them today!
- e. Links to include in posts or on webpage:
- i. AISC WFF page: <https://abinvasives.ca/resources/certified-weed-free-forage/>
  - ii. Your counties WFF page: ###
  - iii. AISC WFF Program outline: [https://youtu.be/ONd\\_0\\_HQkv4](https://youtu.be/ONd_0_HQkv4)
  - iv. NAISMA WFF page: <https://naisma.org/programs/weed-free-products/>
  - v. NAISMA Minimum Standards: <https://yjccc8.a2cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NAISMA-WFF-Minimum-Standards-Final4-16-20.pdf>

- vi. Weed species covered in the Weed Free Forage Program :  
<https://yjccc8.a2cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AB-Weed-List-and-NAISMA-List-Updated-Sept-2022.pdf>
- f. Images (x4) for Social Media posts found at the bottom of this document.
- g. Interactive display to educate individuals about the risks of contaminated forage.
  - i. To create this display, please gather the following materials: 2x Tupperware containers with lids, clean hay or straw from a field, a few seed heads, burrs, root fragments or other propagative materials.
  - ii. Place clean hay or straw in both Tupperware containers.
  - iii. Add propagative materials to one of the Tupperware containers.
  - iv. Use to educate audiences on which forage they would prefer to have and why. Explain to them the benefits of having Weed Free Forage and how they can obtain it for use or for certifying their own fields.

### 3. Additional educational strategies:

The following are suggested tools and activities that could be implement in your County or MD to promote the Certified Weed Free Forage Program:

- Digital engagement and training:
  - online social media campaigns
    - contest partnering with pork and beef producers – boar basket giveaway
    - contest for best bale art around Christmas time: ‘Deck the halls with bales!’
    - Radio advertising to reach rural audiences
  - training webinars and/or free to attend “what landowners need to know”
  - encourage municipalities and community organizations to use display materials and consistent messaging, download EDDMapS to report invasives, put up signs saying this property bales weed free forage
  - paid ads through TV, radio, print, press releases, billboards and social media boosting
- In-person engagement and training:
  - development of training tools such as canned slide deck, pull-up banner, handouts, factsheets, posters and other promotional materials
  - radio talk to target new users
  - field trip/walk around certified field, and storage area
  - other engagement and training workshops
  - promote materials at various tradeshow, conferences and other events
  - educational tools or promotional items to promote the program



Images:

# Looking to purchase Certified Weed Free Forage?











**Is your forage  
Certified Weed Free?**





*Maureen Vadnais 2010*