

Nassella, needlegrass spray cleared for use

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You can't wipe the smile off Ben Minehan's face.

The Marlborough District Council Senior Biosecurity Officer has led a lengthy campaign to get the chemical flupropanate officially approved for use in New Zealand by the Food Safety Authority. The official paperwork arrived this week.

This gives farmers a selective weapon against Nassella tussock and Chilean needlegrass, without destroying valuable pasture. It has the potential to shave thousands off the grubbing bill.

The spray kills the invasive South American pests within nine months, as well as seedlings for up to five years. Approval is for ground control only at this stage although a modified reassessment application for aerial spraying has been lodged by the council and could be approved within six months.

Unlike glyphosate, Taskforce will not kill grass like ryegrass and cocksfoot. Nor will it bowl white

clover. Subterranean clovers are susceptible in autumn and winter however, so spray timing is critical. Danthonia and red clover are both susceptible.

The council initiated the application after a survey of 500 farmers in 2007 indicated a groundswell of interest.

It became a personal crusade for Minehan when he saw its effectiveness in Australia in 2005. Flupropanate has been used there since 1972. Although it cost \$200,000 to run field trials and gain approval, Minehan says this is "peanuts" compared to grubbing and inspection costs.

Paul Kemp, farming 1600 hectares south of Blenheim, says Nassella grubbing costs him \$25,000/year. "It's a sentence."

He is looking forward to being able to aerial spray Taskforce, especially after spraying fern which provides open ground for Nassella to seed.

"It would be ideal for this step when developing the land."

Nassella is found on 91,000ha in

Marlborough (300 properties) and costs \$800,000/year for grubbing and \$200,000/year for inspection. Just over 300,000ha in Canterbury is similarly afflicted, while Hawke's Bay has 100ha of infestation.

The price is yet to be set but in Australia a 20 litre drum of Taskforce costs \$600 including GST (Australian dollars). A drum gives 1000 knapsacks or 10 hectares of coverage at two litres/ha, making it very cost effective, says Minehan. At \$800/drum it would be eight cents/knapsack.

When applied as a boom spray, the withholding period is 120 days. For spot-spraying, it's 14 days. Farmers can learn more at field days in Canterbury on November 7, Marlborough 8 and 9 and Hawke's Bay 10 and 11. Minehan encourages farmers to ring PGG Wrightson and order the herbicide before the field days as it takes up to three weeks to arrive from Australia. Landowners need to be approved handlers to use it. Biosecurity NZ, PGG Wrightson and seven councils funded the registration process.



SUCCESSFUL CRUSADE: Ben Minehan is a happy man. He has led a successful crusade to get the Nassella tussock and Chilean needlegrass herbicide Taskforce registered for use in New Zealand.

Photo: Joanna Grigg



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