

# The Vegetation Manager

Serving the vegetation management industry

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## Winning the Race Against Herbicide Resistance

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Fall Edition

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# FALL



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## Featured Article

# Winning the Race Against Herbicide Resistance

'It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place,' says the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. The same can be said about the world of weeds and herbicides. As weed species develop resistances to common herbicides, we are now caught in our own Red Queen race. To avoid being overtaken, we must use our current herbicides more wisely, while awaiting new herbicides that lie on the distant horizon.

Resistance is a serious problem in the world of herbicides. If one in a million plants can survive an onslaught of Roundup, it won't take long before that plant reproduces and spreads. Soon the herbicide becomes useless against the newly dominant strain. This is called the Red Queen effect, or the evolutionary arms race: cheetahs develop speed and stealth for killing, while gazelles evolve keen eyesight and fast reflexes for evasion. Nothing in nature ever stands still.

Herbicide cycling is one of the best ways that individual applicators can maintain the pace with resistant strains. By rotating herbicides, you can target that one-in-a-million plant, since it's unlikely that mutant strains will have multiple resistances. This is an industry-wide best practice, and pesticide labels indicate the necessity of rotating to a different active ingredient.

But are Alberta's vegetation managers practicing proper cycling? 'It's up to the applicator to follow best management practices, to try to prevent resistance,' says Vivianne Servant, a pesticide certification specialist with the provincial Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. 'Because it is something they would do on their own, you get the whole gamut.'

Servant says that while many companies follow best practices, others are less scrupulous in their standards. 'We do get quite a range of uptake on it. We have investigations every year – with all of the different pesticide industries – and that's typically what we see.... We do proactive inspections, and we also see the people who are working really hard to do the best they can.'

But some researchers say that cycling may not be enough. A recent statement by six research scientists in the journal *Weed Science* – including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) scientist Bob Blackshaw – highlights the perils of our current approach to herbicides. According to the scientists, we may be losing the Red Queen race:

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## Featured Article Continued...

'Apparently, herbicides are a nonrenewable resource. No major herbicide sites of action have been introduced in the past 20 years, few new herbicide sites of action are on the horizon, and weed resistance to glyphosate and other herbicides is a 'tsunami' still out to sea but approaching land.'

Indeed, resistance to glyphosate – known by its trade name as Roundup – has begun to emerge in a number of weed species around the world. In 2011, glyphosate-resistant kochia was discovered in three fields in southern Alberta. Later that fall, a random sampling of other fields in the area (within 20 kilometres) found that 7 out of 46 fields were resistant. A broad-scale survey of kochia populations across southern Alberta should reveal the larger picture by the summer.

Blackshaw discussed the resistant kochia issue at January's Agronomy Update, where he expressed his disappointment that it had taken so long for the resistant strain to come to light. Glyphosate-resistant kochia 'is out there. It's reasonably widespread already,' he told the conference. 'Now that we're aware of it, and we look for it, we shall find it.'

'But it would have been really nice, as a community, as an agricultural group, if we knew that that resistant kochia was out there 5 years ago, because maybe we could have done something a little bit sooner.' 'The good news, Blackshaw said, was that the resistant kochia was still susceptible to dicamba. In other words, the solution is proper cycling.'

The rise of glyphosate-resistant strains may have serious repercussions for Alberta's agriculture industry, as it threatens the viability of canola genetically modified to survive Roundup.

It's not just farmland – almost every industrial sector in southern Alberta is affected by herbicide use, including pipelines, gas lines, ditches and roadsides, power transmission lines, and industrial lots. Resistant kochia has the potential to cause

headaches for vegetation managers throughout Alberta, since spraying other plants with Roundup will merely clear the ground for the new strain.

In the short term, the best solution will likely be a greater push for proper cycling practices among all applicators. Servant says that her department's first choice is an educational approach – presentations that highlight successes and failures. 'While we're there, we identify to them some of the investigations that we've done, so that they're aware of where people are getting into trouble.'

Servant says that the Industrial/Forestry Advisory Committee – a group of industry and government representatives, including the IVMAA – will be one of the main sites of action. 'We meet once a year and talk to the industry... come together to discuss industry issues, our issues, water monitoring results, a variety of things, and try to work proactively: to prevent, or mitigate, or talk about ways forward. I think that's a good way to do it: work together, rather than work at opposing ends.'

If that approach fails, Servant says that more regulations, more inspections, or more power to industry associations may be in the cards. 'There isn't a magic bullet,' she says. 'I think that all of those would probably have a place. The regulations are in place to protect from harm – they're protecting the applicator, the public, and the environment from harm. The legislation compels a certain amount, but from that point up, then it's up to the applicator to follow best management practices.'

What about long-term solutions? It's hard to say. Cycling herbicides remains a vital component of future weed control strategies, but that may not be enough, according to the Weed Science six. They call for a new understanding of weed management diversity, using a variety of tactics – such as diverse crop rotations, higher seeding rates, physical weed control, and weed seed destruction – to lengthen the useful lifespan of herbicides. As more details emerge about the resistant kochia strain, Alberta's vegetation managers may find that they need to run faster, simply to remain in the same place.



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# Update on the UTW-UTT Committee

By: Angus Hill, Neil Thiessen



The Utility Tree Worker and Utility Tree Trimming Certification Program has long been a successful venture for the IVMAA. The focus is on ensuring people who are employed in the utility tree industry are working safely and have reached a certain level of competence. This program over the years has been mimicked across the country and over time other jurisdictions have established their own programs and certification processes.

In light of the changing entry level demographics and employment conditions in Alberta, the UTW-UTT Committee has recognized for some time that this course needed to be refreshed and upgraded. Our partners in the delivery of the training, Olds College, have gone through some significant organizational changes which resulted in a review of their business relations with organizations such as the IVMAA and it has also resulted in a new team from Olds that the IVMAA will be dealing with in the future.

The UTW-UTT Committee, headed by Angus Hill the Director-in-Charge and chaired by Debbie Bailey of Olds College, are working hard to ensure the course and certification process are relevant and provide for industry needs. This Committee is made up of industry stakeholders including contractors, utilities, trainers and regulators.

A sub-committee, chaired by Kevin Tritten is currently looking at course curriculum updates and preparing recommendations for changes and upgrades for the governing UTW-UTT Committee's approval.

While it is too early to predict the changes and recommendations, it is clear there are needed changes coming. The members on these committees commit significant time and energy into this process. It is only through their commitment that the certification program remains amongst the best in the industry.

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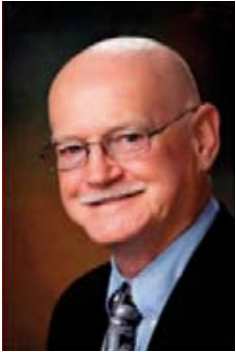
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# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?



An **organization** is defined as a social group which distributes tasks for a collective goal. The word itself is derived from the Greek word organon, itself derived from the better known word ergon, or as we know it, 'organ,' and it means a compartment for a particular job. There

are many different organizational configurations or structures that may serve the needs of various types of organizations, be they government, for profit or non-profit businesses.

Small start-up companies usually don't get too hung up on matters such as organizational structure, and rightfully so. Owners are often hands-on producers within the business and have no need for it.

In my consulting work I have seen many owners outgrow this simple model however. As their businesses grow owners and other key stakeholders begin concerning themselves more with organizational structure as they start running out of capacity.

The primary driver for a more robust structure is the need to have separate accountabilities and duties. Too often, without being disciplined about this process, accountabilities tend to evolve and overlap between people causing confusion, less than optimal performance, and poor morale. Owners tend to take on far too many roles within the business, especially as it grows. As more employees come on board it's even more critical to ensure roles are well defined and visible in some form of an organizational structure.

*continued on next page...*

Thank You.



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# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

Article Continued...

Many small business owners often employ family members in the business, which can lead to confusion with respect to accountability. In some cases, family members may hold the same or similar roles. In other words two people will perform essentially the same tasks and have the same or very similar functional role, which leads to confusion amongst employees and amongst leaders and managers. A key benefit to having clear roles and a clearly defined organizational chart is that it reminds both owners and employees who is responsible for what. Employees often get mixed messages unless accountabilities are crystal clear. Employees function best when they have one "boss" that they are accountable for delivering results to.

If not actively and intelligently managed organizational structure can become very bureaucratic and get in the way of getting things done. It's a balancing act, especially as a small business grows and expands. Every company, regardless of size, absolutely needs to have clear roles with clear accountabilities to avoid waste and confusion. Many small businesses in the tree industry have clear and distinct functional accountabilities for sales, finance, and field production, for example. They also have clearly defined roles such as manager, supervisor, and foreman. Many businesses, however, do not have this clarity.

As a business owner or manager, the key thing to remember is that the purpose of an organizational structure is ultimately to serve customers. It's not about title or ego; it's about service. The organizational structure must be aligned with delivering the best possible service to customers. Managers and employees who are not clear on their responsibilities and accountabilities and are confused over reporting lines simply cannot serve customers in a way that will ensure a profitable and sustained business over time. When organizational clarity is achieved and managed properly the business has a dramatically improved chance of not just meeting, but exceeding customer expectations.

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