

Untangling Growers' Responses to the Field Bindweed Survey

By Rochelle Eisen

Who responded?

A total of 28 responses were received, 24 of those from organic producers. Most were vegetable producers, some fruit producers (tree, berry, grape) and a smattering of grain, forage, seed and herb producers. Twenty-six of the participants had field bindweed on their farms.

What did they say?

Do you consider field bindweed a problem on your farm? Does it reduce your production? Does it impact your yield or production quality? (i.e., does it have an economic impact on your operation?)

There were 17 comments submitted in response to this open-ended question. Two respondents said it wasn't a problem as they could control it, with the remaining 15 making it very clear that field bindweed was having an impact on various aspects of their operations. In most instances the impact was increased labour and weeding expenses; and in some cases crop quality was being compromised, particularly for grape, grain and cut flower producers.

64% felt they could not stop it from spreading no matter the soil type or the level of compaction. One person mentioned that the bindweed was not as bad in a non-irrigated sandy area while everyone else didn't feel irrigation or lack thereof was a factor.

A significant number of respondents mentioned that on their farms field bindweed was more evident in hedgerows, and along fence lines where they did not cultivate regularly, but than others mentioned

it didn't seem to matter if they were cultivating or not.

A number of operators mentioned that they have switched from perennial to intensive annual production so they could cultivate more frequently to stay ahead of the bindweed (someone mentioning cultivating every second day). A few mentioned they had abandoned certain areas of their farms to avoid the field bindweed. Others said that they had switched to using transplants, as direct seeded crops couldn't keep ahead of the bindweed; another switched away from any trellised cropping systems. Some were working with various mulching materials to help get ahead of the bindweed.

Do you know how these areas initially got infested? If yes, please explain. For example, transported in soil or manure, brought in on machinery, was already present when production began, etc.

A third of respondents said it was already on their properties when they purchased; another third felt they brought it onto their farm in loads of manure or purchased poorly composted materials. One person even mentioned they thought it had come in on a load of straw, another felt it had arrived in a load of gravel, another with some nursery stock. Another felt it was creeping in from the property edges.

Only 27% of respondents could estimate crop and income losses and unfortunately the question was faulty as it did not ask on a per acre basis, making it impossible to come up with per acre rate of loss. Some mentioned \$10,000 a year as a rough figure. But overall most operators

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have minimized their losses by avoiding the areas that are the most impacted.

Hope on the Horizon

Despite the clear and direct impact field bindweed is having on a portion of organic producers in BC unfortunately the results of this survey are too slim to have an impact on how field bindweed is categorized by the various ministries in BC. For now *Convolvulus arvensis* will remain listed as an invasive plant by the BC Ministry of Forest and Range's Biocontrol Program, as a prohibited noxious weed under the Canada Seeds Act, and as a nuisance weed in certain regions by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

Amazingly there is some hope on the horizon. Karen Bailey, an AAFC Research Scientist in Saskatoon has been working on the development of a bioherbicide derived from *Phoma macrostoma* — a fungus. She has found *Phoma* able to set back broadleaved weeds like dandelion, Canada thistle, and even field bindweed (unbelievable) as the infection turns the plant tissue white making it impossible for the plant to photosynthesis. Repetitive applications are needed for persistent monsters like thistle and bindweed but Karen believes *Phoma* will prevail. The product is at least two years away from commercial licensing for use in turf systems and agricultural use registrations to follow.

In closing, I'd like to thank all survey participants for their input! There may not be much good news yet, but there is hope, and there is also always the field bindweed support group!

Rochelle Eisen is COABC's Organic Extension Agent.

Bindweed Support Group



Are you a field bindweed sufferer? Do you suffer in silence? Did you just wake up one morning and it was there? Have you been ignoring the signs?

Contact Rochelle Eisen 250-547-6573
extension@certifiedorganic.bc.ca to join.

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