

Organic farming Locust Spraying Issues

During spring and summer large numbers of locusts can be produced in the agricultural regions of Western Australia. Spraying locusts generally commence in early October.

Organic farms are considered sensitive areas by the Department of Agriculture and Food and no insecticide are sprayed in these areas by the Department.

It is the responsibility of the landholder to identify the organic farm and sensitive areas for the Department. Early liaison and communication with your OIC Forward Command and neighbours is essential.

Organic farming management options

- In Priority Target Zones located in Shires with an extreme locust risk, the Department will be distributing maps of individual properties to landholders prior to the commencement of spraying. Organic farming operations either on or neighbouring the property should be clearly marked.
- A Department surveyor will mark on the map the location of locust infestations to be sprayed. The pilot will use the map to spray the locusts avoiding the marked sensitive areas.
- A buffer zone of greater than 1.5 km upwind will be maintained around homesteads when aerial or mister spraying. Consideration will also be given for a downwind buffer for high risk sensitive areas, eg aquaculture facilities will have a downwind buffer of 300 meters.
- Buffer zones of greater than 50 meters upwind when using boomsprayers for fenitrothion applications will be maintained around the sensitive areas. Consideration will also be given for a downwind buffer for high risk sensitive areas, eg aquaculture facilities will have a downwind buffer of 50 meters.
- Where landholders are conducting their own spraying, organic farmers should liaise with neighbours and discuss sensitive areas and buffer zones and how they affect intended spraying programs, well before spraying commences.
- It is not possible to spray a protective buffer zone around organic farming operations because registered insecticides do not have any residual properties beyond two or three days and it will be very difficult to predict when locusts will arrive on a particular property and from which direction.
- A naturally occurring fungus, *Metarhizium anisopliae*, known commercially as Green Guard[®], has shown potential in the control of the Australian plague locust and would be appropriate for use on organic farms. The fungus should be applied when the locust hoppers are in the early instars so there is time for it to kill a large proportion of the locusts. Unlike other pesticides it takes several days to have an affect and it will not protect plants if significant damage is already occurring or is imminent.

For further information contact the Department of Agriculture and Food:

Pest and Disease Information Service

Freecall 1800 084 881; Email info@agric.wa.gov.au

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