

# Chilean Needle Grass

## AWARENESS PROGRAMME



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## Chilean needle grass: a threat to agriculture and the environment

### What should I do if I think I have found Chilean needle grass on my property?

If you think you have found Chilean needle grass on your property or suspect that you have purchased contaminated seed, propagation material, stock or feed, report it to one of the regional authorities listed within this brochure immediately.

### Further information

For further information regarding Chilean needle grass or farm biosecurity visit the Chilean needle grass Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/chileanneedlegrass](https://www.facebook.com/chileanneedlegrass) or contact one of the following regional authorities:

#### ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY

Phone 0800 EC INFO (0800 32 4636)  
[www.ecan.govt.nz](http://www.ecan.govt.nz)

#### MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Phone 03 520 7400  
[www.marlborough.govt.nz](http://www.marlborough.govt.nz)

#### HAWKE'S BAY REGIONAL COUNCIL

Phone 0800 108 838  
[www.hbrc.govt.nz](http://www.hbrc.govt.nz)

## By working together we can stop the spread



## What is Chilean needle grass?

Chilean needle grass is a pest plant which poses a significant threat to the sustainability of arable and pastoral farming in New Zealand.

## Where is Chilean needle grass?

Chilean needle grass is widespread in Marlborough and Hawke's Bay. It was detected in North Canterbury in 2008 and now affects 300 hectares in Canterbury.

Chilean needle grass has the potential to infest an estimated 15 million hectares primarily on the east coasts of the North and South Islands. Marlborough District Council, Hawke's Bay Regional Council, Environment Canterbury and the Ministry of Primary Industries are working in partnership to prevent further spread of the pest.

## Why is Chilean needle grass a problem for landowners?

Chilean needle grass seeds prolifically and can displace pasture and desirable vegetation, leading to reduced pasture and crop yields. It is unpalatable to stock when in seed leading to a reduction in the number of stock able to be carried during this period.

Additionally, Chilean needle grass seeds catch on passing animals, particularly sheep. The seeds have a sharp, needle-like tip which can penetrate the skin and muscle, damaging the hide and causing painful abscesses which can lead to downgrading of the carcass. Lambs are particularly vulnerable to seeds penetrating their eyes and causing blindness.



A change in farming practices is often required as stock must be removed from infested areas from late October until March to avoid contact with seeds.

Further, the use of herbicide to control Chilean needle grass can be costly and the enforced containment requirements can be restrictive and inconvenient.

## How can Chilean needle grass be identified?

Chilean needle grass is a tufted perennial plant which can grow to one metre in height in the absence of grazing. Its leaves are bright green and harsh to the touch. It is difficult to identify prior to flowering.



Seed panicles are present from late October until March during which time the plant is more easily identified due to the reddish purple colour of the seed heads when they first emerge from the panicle and their long, twisting awns (tails). The reddish purple colour of the seed heads fades to light brown as the seeds mature and eventually detach from the panicle. Awns can intertwine to form clusters of seed prior to detaching.

Seeds are approximately 7cm in length. Short, backward-facing hairs run the length of the awn and assist the seed in catching on passing animals. The seed head has a sharp, needle-like tip which can penetrate the skin and muscle. The corkscrew-like awn assists in propelling the seed through both the fleece and the flesh. The seed head is barbed, with backward-facing hairs which are longer than those along the awn. This makes the seeds difficult to remove once embedded.



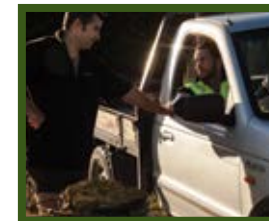
## Where is Chilean needle grass likely to be found and how does it spread?

Chilean needle grass prefers dry, sunny faces. Its seeds are heavy and tend to fall close to the plant rather than being wind dispersed. The seeds can, however, be spread by people, animals, vehicles, machinery and equipment as well as in soil, mud and contaminated feed. As such, it is also likely to be found around yards, woolsheds and parking areas as well as along vehicle access tracks and roadsides.

## What can I do to protect my property?

By implementing some basic vehicle hygiene and farm biosecurity practices on your property you can minimise the spread of Chilean needle grass from undetected sites.

- Ensure that all staff are familiar with how to identify Chilean needle grass and that they remain vigilant for seeding plants from late October until March.
- Ensure that all staff and visitors, whether contractors or guests, check that their vehicles, machinery, equipment, boots and clothing are clean and free from soil, mud and seed before entering the property. Ask contractors about the Chilean needle grass status of any properties that they have been on before yours. If you are concerned that they may be carrying Chilean needle grass seed don't let them on your property until they have cleaned their vehicles, machinery and equipment.



- Source only certified seed or propagation material.
- Before purchasing stock or grazing someone else's stock on your property, ask questions about where the stock have come from and whether they could be carrying Chilean needle grass seed. Similarly, if you are considering grazing your own stock off your property think about where the stock are going and whether they could be carrying Chilean needle grass seed when they return to your property. If in doubt, contact one of the regional authorities listed within this brochure.
- Ensure any feed that you purchase is free from Chilean needle grass and its seed. If in doubt, contact one of the regional authorities listed within this brochure.

