IWMPRAISE — H2020-SFS-2016-2017/H2020-SFS-2016-2 – Inspiration sheet no. 17
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JACOBAEA VULGARIS GAERTN. – *SENECIO JACOBAEA*
Common ragwort

Scientific name: *Jacobaea vulgaris* Gaertn. – *Senecio Jacobaea*

English name: Common ragwort
French name: Séneçon Jacobée, Séneçon de Jacob
German name: Jakobsgreiskraut
Spanish name: Hierba cana, Hierba de Santiago
Italian name: Senecione comune, Senecio/Erba di San Giacomo
Danish name: Engbrandbæger
Dutch name: Jakobskruiskruid
Slovene name: Šentjakobov grint, Šmarni grint

A NEW WEED?

Common ragwort has been described as a field weed, but only rarely. This roadside species is known for its antiseptic, healing and anti-inflammatory pharmaceutical properties.
At excessive population densities, common ragwort can become a nuisance in grasslands. Only the immature plants are eaten by sheep and it can reduce the quality of harvested hay.
Classified as an invasive species in the grasslands and croplands of the provinces of Eastern Canada, common ragwort has been blamed for numerous livestock losses. However, rigorous control in grasslands, roadsides and field margins with the aim of preventing seed production have reduced populations of the species substantially.

BOTANY – ECOLOGY

Family: **Asteraceae** (= **Compositae**)
Life cycle: perennial (or biennial), self-pollinating. Regrows from root buds (**hemicryptophyte**). Dispersal by seeds.
Favourable environment: sun-loving **ruderal** plant, common on grasslands, roadsides and field margins, wastelands.
Botanical characteristics: blueish-green rosette with a stem 40 cm to 100 cm in height. Plant glabrous or pubescent. The leaves are deeply divided, with a dominant terminal lobe, and are morphologically variable, rather glabrous, with a grayish tint on the underside. Leaves obovate, with a lobed contour. The lower leaves are petiolate; the upper leaves are sessile (no petiole), with the auricles embracing the stem. Bloom: June to August. Large flowerheads with yellow florets.
Characteristics of the seeds: ca. 60 seeds per flower, dispersed by wind (**anemochory**) over short distances. Achene ca. 2 mm with a white pappus that falls rapidly. The achenes may remain in seed stocks for 5 years or more.

Figure 1 - Ragwort flowerheads harboring numerous insects

Figure 2 - Inflorescences

Figure 2 - Rosette - vegetative stage

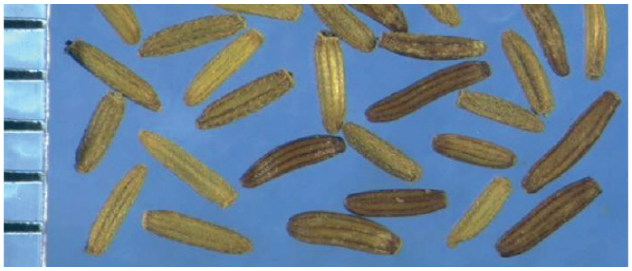

Figure 2 - Seeds — achenes

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WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR ITS PRESENCE IN NO-TILL SYSTEMS?

Common ragwort is not ecologically adapted for survival in agricultural fields in which the soil is worked on a regular basis. Its presence in no-till would also be closely linked to lack of soil tillage and to wind dispersal. These allelopathic capacities would facilitate its establishment.

At present, there is not enough data on its dynamics to say if its presence in no-till fields will remain restricted to a few isolated plants or if it is a species that will require diligent control in order to prevent it from taking over fields.

CONTROL

Chemical control is one of the effective tools for managing ragwort. Hormone-type herbicides (HRAC O; 2,4-D, 2-4 MCPA) will effectively control plants in the rosette stage. The efficacy of glyphosate appears more limited. Mowing limits seed production but may favor the growth of new stems. Hand weeding is perhaps a viable strategy over the long term.

LIVESTOCK HAZARD!

Unpalatable, toxic to young livestock, including horses (intoxication often fatal). Common ragwort contains toxic alkaloids (pyrrolizidines) that cause severe liver damage. Although common ragwort is normally not particularly appetizing, horses may consume it in forage, in silage or on pasture if other vegetation is sparse. Sheep seem to be at less risk.

RISK OF CONFUSION

With other perennial species of the genus Senecio: hoary ragwort (*S. erucifolius*), sticky ragwort (*S. viscosus*), etc., which are distinguished by their more abundant or sticky hairs. There is little risk of confusion with common groundsel (*S. vulgaris*), a more delicate annual species that is very common in cultivated fields.

Figure 5 - Common ragwort in no-till winter wheat

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