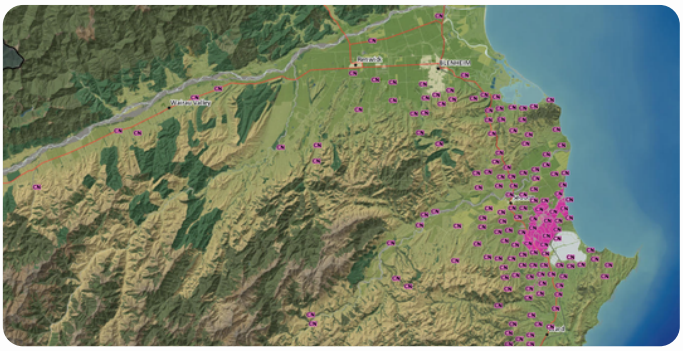
CHILEAN NEEDLE GRASS NEWSLETTER SPRING 2026

MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Chilean Needle Grass Impacts

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is an invasive perennial grass originating from South America. It is unpalatable to livestock, outcompetes productive pasture species, and can have a significant impact on farm productivity. It's sharp seeds create serious animal welfare concerns, cause blindness and can penetrate wool and skin. This then contaminates wool, affects meat quality, resulting in significant economic and animal welfare impacts. CNG has been present in Marlborough for over 80 years, with infestations spreading beyond the core Blind River area to several dryland sites across Marlborough. Estimates suggest that **farm earnings can be reduced by up to 25%** on properties affected by CNG. These impacts are expected to increase over time, with modelled figures indicating that a do-nothing scenario, where CNG is not actively managed, could result in production losses exceeding **$1.16 billion across the country**. As a result, ongoing management is required to prevent further spread. Success relies on the combined efforts of landowners, communities, industry, and organisations working together across the region.



Current CNG Sites Across Marlborough

Marlborough District Council Programme Update

Last summer Marlborough District Council (MDC) completed their yearly CNG control, surveillance and inspections. The total number of affected properties has increased to **268** in 2026, up from **194** known CNG sites in 2021, an increase of **74** sites over five years. While some of this increase can be attributed to subdivisions and property splits, it also reflects a rise in the total area affected. CNG primarily spread through the physical transport of the sharp, viable seeds by livestock, vehicles and machinery and contaminated feed from one property to another.



Potential Spread of Chilean Needle Grass

Marlborough has the largest known infestation of CNG in New Zealand. The total infested area has grown by **16 ha** from last year, reaching **2,642.6 ha**. However, **136,012 ha** of Marlborough pastureland are climatically suitable for CNG, more than **50 times the area** currently infested, posing a significant risk of economic loss and environmental damage to the region.This broader risk highlights the importance of continued surveillance, early reporting, landowner action, management of spread pathways and control efforts to protect Marlborough's productive land.

Chilean Needle Grass Landowner Obligations

Preventing the spread of CNG is a shared responsibility. The Regional Pest Management Plan, prepared under the Biosecurity Act 1993, includes rules governing the movement of livestock, feed, machinery, soil and plant material from infested properties. Breaching these rules is an offence under section 154N(19) of the Biosecurity Act 1993.
These measures are in place to protect Marlborough's agricultural industry and economy, while helping prevent the spread of CNG to other regions and reducing the wider risk to New Zealand.

Further information on landowner obligations, including exemptions, is available on the **Marlborough District Council Website**.

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Spring 2026

Best Practice Guidelines

Preventing the spread and arrival of CNG

Vehicles, machinery, equipment, footwear and clothing can spread CNG seed and plant material and contaminated soil between properties. Good hygiene and controlled access are essential to reduce the risk of spreading CNG and other pests.



Chilean needle grass seed ball

Entering a property

Before Arrival

- Arrive with vehicles, machinery, tools, footwear and clothing clean and free of soil, mud, seeds and organic material.
- Check tyres, wheel arches, undercarriages and equipment storage areas.
- Confirm the property's biosecurity and access requirements.

On Arrival

- Follow visitor sign-in procedures (e.g. Onside, Safe Visit).
- Use designated roads, tracks and parking areas.
- Avoid unnecessary access to paddocks, crop areas and livestock areas.
- Disclose recent visits to high-risk or infested sites if requested.

Before Leaving

- Inspect vehicles and equipment for soil, vegetation and organic material.
- Remove any contamination before travelling to another property.
- Clean tools and equipment and dispose of waste material appropriately.

CHECK, CLEAN & CLEAR

Property owners

Property owners can reduce biosecurity risks by:

- Limiting entry and exit points.
- Displaying clear biosecurity signage and contact information.
- Maintaining an up-to-date biosecurity policy.
- Providing a designated cleaning area with equipment such as high-pressure water or compressed air.
- Keeping records of visitors entering the property.

Cleaning Standards

To effectively remove contamination:

1. Remove soil, plant material, manure and debris and dispose of it appropriately.
2. Sweep or blow out vehicle interiors and machinery using compressed air where required.
3. Wash external surfaces using water and detergent if necessary.
4. Pay particular attention to tyres, wheel wells, undercarriages, steps and equipment mounts.

Chilean Needle Grass Management In Marlborough

A long-term NZ Landcare Trust trial investigated a range of management options for CNG, including competitive pasture establishment, oversowing, cropping, herbicide programmes, and vineyard management. The trial found that dense pasture species such as lucerne and cocksfoot provided the best long-term control of CNG. Integrated management using herbicides, pasture renewal and good land management also reduced infestations, but ongoing whole-farm management remains essential.

For more information on the trial results delivered by NZ Landcare Trust visit **Marlborough District Council website**



Chilean needle grass seed head

03 520 7400 | mdc@marlborough.govt.nz
marlborough.govt.nz

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Chilean Needle Grass Management for Vineyards

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is a serious pest weed that can spread through both seed, contaminated soil and by movement, such as machinery, vehicles and equipment. Seeds readily attach to livestock, clothing, machinery, and equipment, making vineyard hygiene and biosecurity critical to preventing its establishment and spread. Early detection and proactive management are the most effective ways to reduce long-term impacts.

Preventing CNG from entering a vineyard

Vineyard owners should implement strong biosecurity practices to minimise the risk of introducing CNG. All machinery, vehicles, and equipment moving between vineyards or properties should be thoroughly cleaned before arrival and departure. Loose plant material, seeds, and soil should first be removed with compressed air, followed by a complete washdown using a water blaster, steam cleaner, or high-pressure hose. Having a dedicated wash down area (such as a concrete pad), means any waste material generated during cleaning can be contained and disposed of appropriately. Livestock brought onto a property should not originate from areas known to have CNG infestations. Staff should be trained to recognise CNG in both vegetative and reproductive stages and undertake regular surveillance of vineyards, roadsides, hillsides, and other unmanaged areas. Resources can be found on the **Marlborough District Council's website**.

What to do if CNG is found

CNG is a notifiable pest weed. If identified on a property, growers should contact the Marlborough District Council at **03 520 7400 or biosecurity@marlborough.govt.nz** which may assist with developing a biosecurity management plan and provide additional support. Mapping infestations and regularly monitoring unaffected areas are important steps in understanding and containing spread. Soil disturbance should be minimised, as seeds can remain viable in the soil for extended periods and may be brought back to the surface through cultivation.



Chilean needle grass in a vineyard

Managing established infestations

Management strategies should be tailored to the severity of the infestation.

For **light infestations**, the focus should be on containment. Isolate affected areas where practical, avoid mowing, regularly apply herbicide, destroy seed heads, and remove plants before they can spread.

For **moderate infestations**, growers should actively work to reduce the infestation. Machinery hygiene becomes increasingly important, contractors should be informed of the risk, and soil movement should be avoided. Grazing should generally be excluded and mowing managed carefully to minimise seed production and spread.

For **heavy infestations**, long-term reduction strategies are required. This includes maintaining strict hygiene protocols, reducing mowing, controlling infestation edges, and progressively replacing infested inter-row vegetation with competitive swards through targeted spraying and re-drilling programmes.

Landowners are encouraged to remain proactive, as sustained management efforts can significantly reduce infestation levels over time. Care must be taken when considering herbicides with residual activity, as some products are not approved for use within vineyards due to the risk of SWNZ certification, contamination or withholding periods.

Overall, successful CNG management relies on vigilance, strong biosecurity practices, early intervention, and consistent long-term control measures.

Tim Towers I Biosecurity Advisor – New Zealand Winegrowers

Biological Control-Chilean Needle Grass Rust

Chilean needle grass rust (*Uromyces pencanus*) is a leaf pathogen native to South America. Although approved for release in New Zealand by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in 2011, delays in obtaining an export permit from Argentina meant releases did not begin until spring 2024.



Rust spores on CNG

The rust attacks CNG leaves, reducing plant vigour and seed production and in severe cases causes foliage dieback. It is identified by cinnamon-brown spores on leaves. Trials in Argentina showed severe infection under hot, dry conditions. Spores germinate best between 15°C and 25°C when moisture is present, with spring and autumn providing ideal conditions for establishment and spread. The first releases in Marlborough were made in October 2024 at two properties in Blind River, with a further five releases completed since. Rust spores have been detected at three monitored sites, through field inspections and leaf sample analysis. While it is too early to assess the long-term success, early results are encouraging, and once established, the rust is expected to help reduce the spread and impact of CNG over time.

Emerging Pest Threats

Marlborough's climate makes it vulnerable to new pest plants that could become significant biosecurity threats if established.

African lovegrass

Is a long-lived, fast-growing grass that produces large quantities of highly viable seed, that can germinate in spring and autumn. It tolerates fire, disturbance, extreme temperatures, and poor or acidic soils. While it does not tolerate prolonged waterlogging, it thrives during drought conditions, making Marlborough well suited to it's establishment and spread. Reports suggest that, If left unchecked it could have a greater economic impact than CNG or Nassella tussock. However, further work is needed to better understand the potential risks and management requirements. MDC's Biosecurity Team was recently notified of a small infestation of African lovegrass in the Ure Valley. Council staff have controlled the plants and undertaken surveillance of the surrounding area, with no additional infestations identified.

Early detection and reporting is critical to preventing the establishment and spread. If you suspect you have found African lovegrass on your property, please contact the **Marlborough Biosecurity Team at biosecurity@marlborough.govt.nz**.

The Season Ahead

Managing and reducing the spread of CNG requires a collective effort from landowners, industry groups, contractors, Council, and the wider community. By working together, we can help protect Marlborough's productive land and reduce the long-term impacts of CNG on the region. Marlborough District Council is committed to supporting landowners and the wider community in managing CNG and other invasive pest species. If you find or suspect CNG, we encourage you to get in touch. Council Biosecurity staff can provide advice on containment and control options. When reporting, photographs, videos and location details are helpful and support efforts to reduce the spread across the region.

See it today, help stop it tomorrow.