

I am Neil Jones from the UK, I have been studying Ragwort and the fear about this plant for almost 20 years now as can be read on my website. <https://ragwortfacts.com/>

I work with several conservation organizations and on my own to combat the misinformation and scare stories about Ragwort.

There is a common misunderstanding about the ragwort law in the UK and at times the law is even deliberately misinterpreted. There is a law called the Weeds Act 1959. Under that law, the government, which incidentally has no obligation, may order people to remove certain plants, including Ragwort, from a specific place. The law was a special type of law. It did not require discussion. It copied powers from a 1920 law.

Conservationists believe it is an outdated measure that has no place in modern landscape management. There is a crisis in biodiversity and we should not demand that people destroy ecologically valuable plants. In 2019, more than 10,000 people signed a petition asking the government to get rid of this archaic law, before the petition system was unexpectedly cut off due to the general election.

In the late 1990s, a campaign was launched by various equine organizations against Ragwort. It was characterized by exaggeration, untruths, and scare stories. This resulted in what is called a "Private Member's Bill" which is a bill introduced by an individual member of parliament. A Bill is not a real law until it has been passed by Parliament. The final law is then called an Act of Parliament. In this case, the bill was sponsored by the British Horse Society. It was originally designed to force people to control Ragwort everywhere. Parliament rejected this but what came out of that bill is the Ragwort Control Act and that act says the government can, but does not have to, create a code of practice. This is a bit strange because they already had that option anyway.

It is important to remember that the Code of Practice is only a guide. And it also explicitly says that it does not want to eradicate ragwort. Some people make the mistake that the Code of Practice is a law. The Code of Practice does have a number of good points, such as the advice on pasture management, but there are also serious problems with the statistical method used to estimate risks. Obviously, the risks around Ragwort are central to knowing if it should be controlled.

The poisoning figures used in the government's risk calculations are a personal commentary from a professor at an academic animal hospital.

These poisonings are then described as "confirmed". This is biochemically impossible because the toxins in ragwort have identical molecular effects as toxins from mouldy food, for example in roughage fodder.

A Freedom of Information Request to the academic animal hospital showed drastically different numbers than those used in the government's estimates. Only one possible case in eight years! Statistically, such a low figure is of no value.

Of course, there were those who were not happy that the law could not be changed to force people to combat ragwort everywhere and they continued to misinform people and repeat false stories.

In 2011, complaints were filed about this with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) that regulates advertising in the United Kingdom. Action was taken against advertisements from organisations including the British Horse Society and Monsanto about, among other things, allegations that the law requires everyone to monitor ragwort. A similar complaint was filed with the Press Complaints Committee (PCC) about Horse and Hound magazine in 2014 and this magazine also had to make a correction. The ASA and PCC are independent and judge complaints by the evidence.

So that's the situation, the law in the UK does not make Ragwort an illegal plant and does not require anyone to control the plant. In exceptional circumstances you may be ordered to control, but there is no obligation to do so. unless you get a rare legal control order.