

Roundup Ready Alfalfa River Bluffs Open Space (RBOS)

A five-year agricultural lease on portions of RBOS began on January 1, 2013 with Royal Vista Equine Inc., the previous lessee. The primary purpose of the lease is hay production on approximately 90 acres in two fields, one on each side of the Poudre River. The alfalfa in the west field is in poor condition and needs to be replanted. Royal Vista Equine Inc. would like to plant Roundup Ready alfalfa (RRA) in the west field (the east field will be planted to grass for grass hay production). This would be the first request for planting a genetically modified crop on Larimer County open space. The Department of Natural Resources is reviewing this request before making a decision by February 2013.

Wikipedia gives this definition for RRA: "a genetically modified variety released by Forage Genetics Int'l in 2005. This was developed through the insertion of a gene owned by Monsanto Company that confers resistance to glyphosate, a broad-spectrum herbicide, also known as Roundup. Although most grassy and broadleaf plants, including ordinary alfalfa, are killed by Roundup, growers can spray fields of Roundup Ready alfalfa with the glyphosate herbicide and kill the weeds without harming the alfalfa crop".

Royal Vista Equine Inc. made the following statements about planting RRA at RBOS:

- Higher production and higher yield per acre with four cuttings rather than three with conventional alfalfa.
- Fields planted to RRA will not deteriorate as fast as conventional alfalfa and will produce at a higher level with a longer period before needing to be replanted.
- RRA produces higher quality hay.
- RRA creates a more visually attractive field; more uniform ground cover, lush growth and no visible weeds (a point very important to Royal Vista Equine Inc. because to them it exhibits good agricultural stewardship).
- Due to the use of RRA in the west field hay production there will be purely alfalfa, not alfalfa/grass mix.
- No specific weed species is targeted at RBOS by using RRA.
- The RRA will be cut before there is 10% bloom to reduce possible RRA pollen transfer to other plants.
- Volunteer RRA and RRA plants outside of the hay cutting area (mainly field edges) will also be cut.
- There are not very many neighboring alfalfa fields near RBOS.

RRA Information

- RRA is used in Larimer County, but there are no acreage statistics available. Monsanto estimates that nationwide 75% of alfalfa is RRA. The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board members feel that use of RRA in Larimer County is much lower than Monsanto's estimates.
- ARDEC, the CSU farm southeast of Wellington, has planted and harvested 50-60 acres of RRA. There was no public review before planting RRA, and they have had no problems and no complaints.
- No organic farms near RBOS that would be affected by genetically modified plants. Nearest alfalfa production is about one mile away (the type of alfalfa there is unknown, but that farmer will be planting the RBOS fields for Royal Vista Equine Inc), and two miles away are RRA production fields.
- There are varying academic and professional opinions about the positive and negative effects of RRA. The primary risk is transference of Roundup resistance to other plants through pollination.

Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) comments:

A brief presentation and discussion of RRA at RBOS took place at the January 2013 AAB meeting. There were several comments, but no conclusion or recommendation occurred. Comments included:

- It's probably not a big issue.
- The benefits don't outweigh the risks.
- I would like to hear more from experts.
- There really aren't many farmers using RRA in Larimer County.
- RRA is not needed when there is proper planting preparation and once a good crop of conventional alfalfa is up and growing well.