Cooperative Extension joins coalition to bring back Nevada’s native plants

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RENO – Nevada’s native rangelands are under constant attack from invasive weeds, wildfire, commercial development and other activities that displace the native plant communities, writes Jay Davison in his Field Guide for Collecting Native Seeds in Nevada. Davison is Plant and Soils Specialist for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

To restore the lands that have been adversely affected by these developments, the BLM and Nevada Governor initiated a project to increase the supply of native seeds produced in Nevada. Davison was a founding member of the group that included state and federal agencies and private producers, to:

- Increase seed collections from public and private lands;
- Establish native seed production fields by Nevada farmers;
- Conduct research on native plant species; and
- Help BLM develop long-term contracts with local growers.

“The demand for native seeds is not large but is expected to grow in the near future,” said Davison. “This provides an opportunity for individuals or groups to earn money by collecting or growing native seeds and then selling them.”

BLM funded the production of Davison’s field guide, used to educate more than 360 people in the identification, collection, handling, storing, monitoring, marketing and a host of other items related to the native seed business.
“We wanted to stimulate seed collection on public and private lands by putting the manual in the hands of interested folks so they would understand the process and the species that are most desirable,” said Ted Angle, BLM’s Native Seed Coordinator. “Jay produced an excellent manual and has been a great source of advice. He knows the economics of growing seeds and has been the most important individual in the native seed collection project.”

The Nevada Department of Agriculture’s specialty crops program funded two producers’ efforts to grow varieties of native seeds. In 2001, Frank Soares, a second-generation Fallon farmer, planted 25 acres with plots of Bluebunch, Thickspike Wheatgrass and Basin Wildrye. “It’s not easy, but we learned a lot,” he reported. “The seed uses a lot less water than alfalfa, but it all depends on the price you get at the end of the three-year growing period.”

Schurz rancher Randy Emm planted Indian Ricegrass on give acres in 2002, but did not receive enough water allocation to yield a successful crop. “Nevertheless, there is a potential here for farmers if they can keep their seed fields weed-free,” he remarked.

“This will never be a huge industry,” commented Dick Beeman, president of the Nevada Wildland Seed Producers Association, “but it could be a very nice cottage industry.”

For further information on the native seed project, contact Davison, (775) 423-5121, davisonj@unce.unr.edu

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