State Regulation of Ribes to Control White Pine Blister Rust

Steven McKay

ADDITIONAL INDEX WORDS. gooseberries, currants, cultivated, Ribes, C. ribicola

SUMMARY. Recent interest in expanding commercial currant and gooseberry (Ribes L.) plantings in the United States has put pressure on the states with Ribes restrictions to review their regulations. A meeting on 9 January 1998 initiated discussion between the state agriculture regulatory agencies, forest pathologists, and horticulturists. Since then a white pine blister rust (WPBR), Cronartium ribicola J.C. Fischer) World Wide Web (Web) site (McKay, 1998) and listserv have been activated to facilitate communication. Vermont is a state that has no regulations on the books at this time. Connecticut and New York also have mentioned that infection rates are low. Maine retains a Ribes reduction program, and Massachusetts is strictly enforcing their regulations. The following summarizes the general consensus among the majority of regulating states: 1) It is desirable to find a way for both white pines (Pinus L.) and commercial Ribes plantings to coexist. 2) More research is needed to survey existing Ribes and pines, the potential impact of commercial plantings versus the impact of existing Ribes, and the potential impact of escape/volunteer seedlings from immune Ribes cultivars. 3) There is interest in permitting immune Ribes cultivars to be planted. 4) There is interest in having consistency in regulations from state to state.

Globalization of the processed and fresh fruit market has placed pressure on U.S. growers to seek crop alternatives and to diversify their businesses. Ribes crops are one choice of interest since they are not widely cultivated in the U.S. at this time. Until now many producers have focused on local markets and are growing a few hundred plants to satisfy local demand. A few producers have successfully expanded to plantings of 2 ha (4.9 acres) or more, and have interest in making further increases.

Some state regulators have reported an increase in inquiries related to Ribes and complaints from growers that the regulations might be outdated. Typical questions and comments included the following. 1) We have heard that white pine weevils (Pissodes strobi Peck) cause more economic damage than WPBR. 2) There are so many wild Ribes in the forest already that a commercial planting would not make a significant difference in the incidence of disease. 3) The rust seems to be spreading in the Western North America, but may be reaching a naturalization in Eastern North America. 4) Use a planting buffer of over 100 m (328 ft) between commercial Ribes plantings and pines. 5) The rust can be controlled by pruning of pines. 6) The rust can be controlled by resistant pines and immune Ribes cultivars. Cooperative extension offices have received similar inquiries as well as requests for technical information. This led to a literature search and polling of foresters, horticulturists, pathologists, and regulators to see if there was any consensus regarding the threat of Ribes to pines because of their role as an intermediate host to WPBR.

Extension Educator, Hudson Valley Commercial Fruit Program, 479 Route 66, Hudson, NY 12534. The cost of publishing this paper was defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. Under postal regulations, this paper therefore must be hereby marked advertisement solely to indicate this fact.
Table 1. The present restriction and prohibition of the genus, *Ribes*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Ribes prohibited</th>
<th>Black currants prohibited</th>
<th>Red currants and gooseberries permitted</th>
<th>State permits required</th>
<th>White pine blister rust immune varieties permitted?</th>
<th>Review of regulations ongoing</th>
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Table 2. Personnel responsible for state agricultural regulations of white pine blister rust.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>State Agriculture Department Contact</th>
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| Delaware           | Randy Ciurlino  
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The varied and inconsistent responses to the investigation led to a meeting on 9 January 1998 to get representatives from all the stakeholders groups around a table to discuss the issue, to update the group on what knowledge we have, what is being researched, and what is lacking.

The consensus of the group was that they would like to see both pines and *Ribes* continue development as commercial crops. *Ribes* regulated states varied in their status and interest in changing regulations as well as their desire for more definitive research data. Also the situation with WPBR in the eastern North America versus western North America is generally recognized as different. Following is a summary of the points in question that need research before regulators would feel comfortable changing restrictions: 1) A survey of wild *Ribes* and pines is necessary to document the extent of WPBR, and the susceptibility of plants in the wild. 2) How long can immune *Ribes* cultivars be expected to remain immune, and what effect if any will their escape into the wild have on the rust’s evolution? 3) Has naturalization of WPBR occurred in Eastern North America? 4) How different are the eastern North American and western North American races of rust, and is there a danger of them penetrating outside their home areas? Are immune

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
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</table>
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Ribes immune to both rust races of WPBR?

As mentioned before, the regulated states vary as to their intent to enforce or change regulations (Table 1, 2). Most states have taken a wait-and-see approach, wanting to have more data formally presented by pathologists and ecologists before changing regulations. Following are some examples of state approaches. Maine strongly believes that their regulation is necessary, and they continue a Ribes reduction program. Vermont has not renewed any regulation, and allows unrestricted Ribes cultivation. New Hampshire is allowing cultivation of WPBR immune cultivars. Most states restricting Ribes cultivation would like to update their regulations based on scientific data that answers questions they have listed. The states would like to see their regulations be consistent, and appropriate for the good health of pine and Ribes plantings. There is interest in developing a list of permissible WPBR immune Ribes cultivars to be used by states that choose to maintain restrictions.

Literature cited