

**REPORT OF THE**  
**JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON**  
**JOHNSONGRASS INFESTATION**  
  
**TO**  
  
**THE GOVERNOR**  
  
**AND**  
  
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 15**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**  
**RICHMOND**  
**1982**

## **MEMBERS OF THE 1977 SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Delegate David G. Brickley  
Senator Howard P. Anderson  
James Bennett  
James Brownell  
Robert B. Delano  
James T. Edmunds  
Richard S. Ellis, IV  
Senator William E. Fears  
Delegate Joseph A. Johnson  
George N. McMath  
Delegate Lacey E. Putney  
Senator William A. Truban

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### **STAFF**

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Division of Legislative Services

**Report of the  
Joint Subcommittee on Johnsongrass Infestation  
To  
The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia  
January, 1982**

To: Honorable Charles S. Robb, Governor of Virginia  
and  
The General Assembly of Virginia

In 1977, this Subcommittee was established to study problems caused by Johnsongrass infestation and Japanese Beetles in Virginia. This report is concerned only with the first of these two problems.

In its 1978 report (House Document No. 17), the Subcommittee recommended the establishment of a pilot program to test means of controlling Johnsongrass. The undersigned members of the 1977 Subcommittee have evaluated the pilot program and consequently submit the following report.

**I. Introduction and Background**

House Joint Resolution No. 257, passed in 1977, established a subcommittee charged in part with the study of Johnsongrass infestation in Virginia. This species of grass, considered among the worst of weeds, reduces crop yields and lowers the value of real property. It is spread when its seed is carried to new fields by birds, wind, or other means; when its rhizomes extend from one area of a field to a larger area; or when equipment carries parts of rhizomes from one field to another field. Heavy infestations of Johnsongrass are common once it is introduced into an area, and the eradication of it is very difficult. The Subcommittee established pursuant to House Joint Resolution No. 257 considered several approaches for dealing with the problem, and recommended a pilot program to test the effectiveness of local control efforts. This recommendation was approved and funded by the 1978 General Assembly.

**II. Evaluation of Pilot Program**

A pilot program was established in the summer of 1978 for three counties representing different areas of the State: Accomack, Dinwiddie, and Loudoun. Each was required to adopt an ordinance declaring Johnsongrass to be a public nuisance. State funding was channeled through the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to pay for half of the program costs, so long as the amount given each county did not exceed \$5,000 per year.

Following the 1979 and 1980 growing seasons, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services sent questionnaires designed to evaluate the Johnsongrass program to the three counties participating in it. All three counties indicated that the program has been effective and that the results have justified the costs. Farmers are now more aware of the problems created by this weed, and their efforts to control it are beginning to show results. In its evaluation, the Department also reached these conclusions:

1. A county ordinance has been useful in controlling Johnsongrass on lands where control efforts would otherwise be lax. Accomack County, however, has encountered problems in enforcing its ordinance in the towns within the county.
2. Johnsongrass control programs work best at the local level. Without local commitment, they will not succeed.
3. Some counties have found it helpful to support the program by paying part of the cost of chemicals which landowners buy to control the weed.

**III. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Subcommittee**

The 1977 Subcommittee was reconstituted in 1981 to review the pilot programs established in the three counties and determine future actions that might be taken to control Johnsongrass. It believes that the pilot programs have been successful and that an expansion of this approach is warranted. Were state funding available to extend the program throughout the Commonwealth at this time, the

Subcommittee would recommend an appropriation sufficient for this purpose. Because of insufficient funds—and because of the difficulty in establishing such a program throughout the entire State at one time—the Subcommittee recommends a more limited expansion.

The Johnsongrass program administered as a pilot program by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in 1978 should be continued and expanded. The Department should be given an appropriation of \$200,000 through the 1982-84 budget addendum to allow up to twenty counties to participate in the program.

The cost-sharing arrangement whereby the State matches county expenditures for a Johnsongrass program (as long as no county receives more that \$5,000 annually for this program) should be continued. Funding beyond 1984 should be considered in the normal budgetary process.

Respectfully submitted,

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