Saffron thistle is found in cultivated paddocks, poor pastures or neglected areas and when present in thick patches can restrict stock movement and cause injury to grazing animals, particularly in the eyes and mouth.

Competition with pastures reduces carrying capacity, and crop yields may also be reduced. In wool growing areas, an increase in the vegetable fault content is likely.

Saffron thistle is more likely to occur on pastures which have been overgrazed, or in soils of low nutrient levels.

As the seed of this plant is heavy it tends to fall at the base of the plant. This causes infestations to be more localised and spread is not rapid.

**Description**

Saffron thistle is an erect, annual herb, growing to one metre or more high.

The leaves are up to 20cm long and deeply divided with stout spines.

Stems are yellowish white or very pale green, flowers being solitary, yellow and surrounded by spiny bracts. Seeds are four sided, 15mm to 8mm long, and ovoid in shape.

**Management**

Deep ploughing, to a depth of 10-15cm will bury many seeds and reduce emergence. Seedlings emerging can be destroyed by shallow cultivation.

Improved perennial or native pastures will prevent establishment, as saffron thistle is a poor competitor.

If annual treatments are performed and seeding is reduced, germination will be reduced.

In pasture areas avoid heavy grazing as it will encourage saffron thistle growth.

Slashing shortly before flowering can also effectively prevent seed production. However, if slashing is carried out too early, plants often regrow and produce new flower heads.

If you would like further information on weeds look at the A–Z Listing of Weeds at Queensland Government Website.

**Reference:** Land Protection (Invasive Plants and Animals), 2007, “PP14, Weed Busters Fact Sheet”, the State of Queensland, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.