

MANATEE LIVESTOCKER

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May / June 2003

Calendar Of Events

May

15

UF/IFAS Range Cattle Research and Education Center - Field Day
Ona, FL - For more information call (863) 735-1314

June

18 - 20

FCA Convention & Allied Trade Show, Marco Island.

October

-

Beef Cattle Reproductive Management School, Wauchula

Florida cattle & hog auctions, location, phone and day of sale:

Monday -

Tampa - Cattlemen's Livestock Auction Market, Inc - 813-626-5164

Wauchula - Hardee Livestock Market, Inc. - 863-773-9747

Tuesday -

Lakeland - Cattlemen's Livestock Auction Market, Inc. - 863-665-5088

Wednesday -

Arcadia - Arcadia State Livestock Market - 863-494-3737

Brachiaria Grasses For Peninsular Florida? By Paul Mislevy

To provide the best forage grasses for commercial producers there is a continued need for screening and testing new forage germplasm and to develop management practices under grazing. A study was established using six tropical grasses from Mexico consisting of four Brachiarias, and two Andropogon's, comparing them with Florona stargrass and Pensacola bahiagrass. The Brachiarias consisted of Insurgente, Abundance, B. dictyoneura, and Chetumal. The Andropogon cultivars were Llanero and Tun tun. The year following establishment, grasses were grazed at 2, 4, 5 and 7 wk frequencies. Grasses were fertilized in the spring of 2000 with 50-30-60 lb/A N-P2O5- K2O + 1.5 lb/A Cu, Zn, Fe, Mn (sulfate form), 0.15 lb/A B and 6.0 lb/A S. A total of 150 lb/A N was applied annually in a split application. Harvesting all grasses at a 2-wk frequency averaged lowest yield (2.0 t/A) and highest nutritive value (Crude protein [CP] 20% and 68% digestibility), whereas at a 7-wk frequency grasses produced highest yield (5.0 t/A) and lowest nutritive value (14% CP and 59% digestibility). Generally a harvest frequency of 4 to 5 wk and grazing frequency of 4 wk is recommended for tropical grasses. In this study grasses producing the highest total yield when harvested at a 5-wk frequency were Florona stargrass (4.8 t/A), Brachiaria Abundance (4.3 t/A) and B. Insurgente (4.1 t/A). Pensacola bahiagrass yielded 1.9 t/A when harvested at the same frequency.

Forage nutritive value of the three highest producing grasses was B. Insurgente 17% CP and 66% digestibility, B. Abundance 17% CP and 68% digestibility and Florona stargrass 22% CP and 60% digestibility. Pensacola bahiagrass also harvested at 5 wk averaged 20% CP and 59% digestibility.

Brachiaria Insurgente and Abundance are excellent yielding and very leafy bunch grasses with little or no winter production. They have good CP concentration and excellent digestibility. In fact digestibility will run 6 to 8 percentage units above Florona stargrass. The problem with Brachiarias at Ona was cold tolerance. The temperature during the fall of 2000 and spring of 2001 dropped below 32oF 11 times with a one time extreme low of 19oF. This temperature regime killed 100% of the Brachiaria study. One commercial producer west of Okeechobee has been growing two Bracharia cultivars for at least 3 yr with no persistence problems. It appears that Bracharia may be a viable alternative for wamer areas of south Florida.

January 2003 Inventory; Declining Herd Trend Continues By T.E. Anton

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) branch of the USDA released its latest cattle inventory numbers and estimates on January 31. They show that cattle inventories have continued the downward trend which began in 1996. That trend puts the cattle industry into the 14th year of the cattle cycle, and there are no clear indications of a herd expansion.

Florida's cattle inventory numbers were in line with the national trend. Overall 2003 Florida cattle and calves inventory is estimated to be down one percent to 1.75 million head from 1.78 million head in 2002. All cows that had calved are estimated to be down 10,000 head to 1.1 million. Beef cows that had calved totaled 953,000, down one percent from 2002, and milk cows that had calved totaled 147,000, down three percent

from 2002. Calf crop numbers show a one percent decline from 940,000 head in 2001 to 930,000 head in 2002.

Heifer hold-backs are a key indicator of potential herd expansion and the inventory numbers show little evidence of such a trend beginning. Beef cow replacements in Florida are down from 140,000 to 130,000 head. Milk cow replacements held steady at 40,000 head. This is consistent with the national figures and may be an indication that the current cycle may last into 2004 and beyond which can potentially translate to continued strong cattle prices through 2006. The already tight fed beef supplies will only get tighter as a result of these shrinking numbers further helping maintain prices in the current economic conditions.

The number of cattle operations in Florida fell slightly during 2001-2002. There were 19,000 cattle operations in Florida in 2002 down 500 operations from 2001. Beef cow operations were steady at 16,500 operations. Milk cow operations declined two percent from 510 operations in 2001 to 500 operations in 2002.

An analysis of size and inventory distribution indicates that operations with over 500 head, roughly 3.4 percent of the operations, account for 57 percent of the Florida cattle inventory. In the dairy industry, operations over 500 head, 20 percent of the total dairy operations, account for 83 percent of the dairy cows in Florida. In contrast, similar sized Florida beef cow operations, 1.7 percent of the total beef operations, account for 45 percent of the state's beef inventory.

Fall and Winter management affects Spring green-up in grass pastures

By Rob S. Kalmbacher

Although temperatures under a heavy canopy are slightly warmer than temperatures of exposed grass crowns, a large grass canopy at the onset of winter does not lessen the chance of stand loss by freezing. When typical frost occurs (as distinct from freezing), a large canopy hinders spring green-up compared to pastures that do not carry a bulk of grass into the spring. Nitrogen fertilization, if applied too late in the fall, decreases frost tolerance because it results in a flush of tender growth. Plants that are rapidly growing can not be frost hardened. In addition, N fertilizer results in a large canopy that shades new replacement growth if it is not removed in late winter. What frequently happens is that the canopy is killed by frost and cattle do not consume it. There is less green forage in the spring compared to pastures with little cover. Frost sensitive grasses like bermudagrasses, digitgrasses, rhodesgrass, and atra paspalum are more prone to this problem than limpograss or bahiagrass. It is best to remove cover by cutting hay and grazing fall regrowth or burning in late winter. In areas where frost is common, the practice of stockpiling forage for winter grazing should be limited to grasses like limpograss.

In temperate regions, many lost stands can be attributed to low K fertilization. Potassium increases the ability of forages to survive freezing. I am not aware of any K fertilizer research on survival of tropical grasses in regions of the sub-tropics where frost is common. On bahiagrass in central and south Florida, this is not an important issue. On hay fields where K is removed with the harvested crop, it is important to use narrow N:K fertilizers to maintain summer production. This may also guard the stand against loss by freezing.

The above articles were extracted from the University of Florida's IFAS "Range Cattle REC Newsletter, March 2003, Volume 6, Number 1."

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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[Back](#) to the Cooperative Extension Newsletters Page



[Back](#) to the South Florida Beef-Forage Program HomePage

