The Cattlemen's Research Station at Ona

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By Findlay Pate

UF/IFAS, Range Cattle REC

This is the first of a series of articles on cattle and forage production to be contributed monthly by the University of Florida, Research and Education Center at Ona to the Heartland Farmer and Rancher. As an introduction I will relate to the reader information about who we are and what we do at the Ona Research and Education Center.

In the late 1930's cattlemen throughout south Florida recognized a need for research to solve the many problems they faced with producing beef cattle on open range. This native range was comprised of a very infertile sandy soil, and a hot, wet, humid tropical summer and cool, dry winter. Problems were completely different from those in other parts of the U.S., or for that matter, north Florida. Cattlemen requested that the University of Florida establish a branch experiment station in south Florida to conduct research on these unique beef cattle production problems.

Cattlemen purchased 3000 acres of property in western Hardee County for this experiment station and donated the land to the State of Florida. The experiment station was started in 1941 under the name 'Range Cattle Station'. For the next 10 years the experiment station worked specifically on problems experienced with producing beef cattle on native range.

With the passage of the second 'Florida Fence Law' in the late 1940's, cattle owners were required to fence cattle on their property. This law, which was passed primarily to keep cattle off of roadways, automatically brought about the use of improved beef cattle production practices in south Florida. It also changed the scope of the research program conducted at the 'Range Cattle Station'.

Research was now needed on converting native land to improved pastures utilizing new and better grasses and legumes. Fertilization practices for growing these better forages was needed. Along with fencing came a need to develop and evaluate better management practices such as rotational grazing and a controlled breeding season. A need for supplementation programs with mineral mixes, molasses feeds, and stored hay were also realized. Better production practices also made possible the extensive use of the Brahman bull in crossbreeding systems.
Improved cattle and forage production practices are still being developed and evaluated at the Ona Research and Education Center. We are continuing to research production problems on native range of which south Florida has over 3 million acres. Our role has expanded to include research on environmental problems facing the cattle industry. Over the coming months we will present and discuss specific cattle and forage production practices that will benefit readers of the Heartland Farmer and Rancher.

Cattlemen and other citizens are invited to visit the Ona Research and Education Center which is located on State Road 663 about 6 miles south of Ona. We are also available for questions at 813-735-1314. This is your Research Center, make use of it.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate