Billy Bass, the long time extension agent in Glades County, once stated; "there are two kinds of pastures in south Florida, bahia and those that are going to be bahia." Billy was very right because Florida cattlemen who plant better grasses usually managed them like bahia, grazing them to the ground in the winter, and continuously grazing them on into the summer. Bahiagrass survives well under this gazing management system, recovering in the spring with the advent of longer days, warm weather, adequate rainfall, and nitrogen fertilizer. Other grasses will not survive under this management system and will be taken over by bahiagrass.

Research has not demonstrated a better grazing management system for bahiagrass, but I believe a three or four pasture system, with once a week rotation is worth the effort. Especially if bahiagrass pastures are heavily stocked or pests, like mole crickets, are prevalent in the area.

For the better quality grasses, rotational grazing is very important. Stargrass, improved bermudagrass, 'Floralta' hemarthria, and rhodesgrass pastures stocked for maximum production require at least four pastures with weekly rotation. If not properly managed these grasses will be lost to bahiagrass and common bermuda. The heavier these grasses are stocked, the greater the number of pastures needed, and the more frequently cattle need to be rotated. In most rotational grazing systems, pastures must be rested at least 21 days, and in some cases longer.

Another advantage of rotational grazing is that it tends to prevent spot grazing. We have all observed that with continuous grazing, cattle graze certain spots to the ground and avoid other areas where the grass grows rank, resulting in poor quality forage which is often never grazed.

Rotational grazing can be practiced with two or more grasses grown in different pastures and accomplish the same objective. Many cattlemen rotate cattle between bahiagrass and a better quality grass, evenly grazing both grasses and not overgrazing the better quality grass. Two or more grasses should not be available in the same pasture because cattle will
prefer one over another, overgrazing the more palatable forage and undergrazing the less desirable forage.

Stargrass, bermudagrass, ‘Floralta' hemarthria, and rhodesgrass pastures can be continuously grazed or infrequently rotated if properly stocked. If continuously grazed, these pastures must not be grazed to the ground. They must be stocked such that a good stubble (6 inches or higher) is maintained.

I have seen ‘Floralta' hemarthria pastures continuously grazed in Okeechobee County with one first-calf heifer per two acres year-round. Cows were fed dry supplement during the winter, but no hay. At the Range Cattle REC, we have continuously grazed ‘Floralta' hemarthria with one yearling heifer per 1.5 acres with no stand lost. Heifers were fed liquid supplement, but no hay. In both of the above situations, Floralta hemarthria was never overgrazed, and a good stubble was maintained.

As previously stated, the secret to successfully using the better quality grasses in south Florida is never overgraze them and maintain a good stubble. This holds true for all grazing systems, continuous or rotation. But, if pastures planted to these grasses are heavily stocked to maximize production, rotational grazing is a must.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate