About 22 years ago UF/IFAS initiated a forage quality testing program at the Range Cattle REC. Testing employed a new technology called near-infrared reflectance which avoided time consuming chemical procedures and provided results within 48 hours after receipt of forage samples.

The testing program was discontinued in 2001 due to budget cuts. There was also an inadequate number of samples submitted by cattle and forage producers to justify keeping the forage testing program going, although the lab also analyze research samples. At its peak the forage testing lab received around 500 samples annually from producers. The lab had the capability to analyze 5,000 samples annually.

States where forage quality testing programs have been most successful are those that produce large quantities of hay and silage. By comparison, hay and silage production in Florida is extremely small. It is almost mandatory that marketed hay be tested because forage varieties used for hay can be extremely variable in quality. Hay quality is affected by maturity at cutting, fertilization practices, hay type, and weather. Forage varieties used for hay in Florida include bermudagrass, stargrass, hemarthria (limpograss), and pangola digitgrass. Bahiagrass which makes up 80% of the improved pastures in Florida varies very little in quality, but is only occasionally used for hay.

There is an excellent lab in New York which analyzes forage samples (Dairy One Forage Analysis Lab, 730 Warren Road, Ithaca, NY 14850-9877, Tele: 1-800-496-3344). It cost $2.00 postage per sample when submitted in bags provided by Dairy One, and $18.00 for the basic analysis package which includes dry matter, crude protein, the fiber series, and calculated energy values. Other analyses that can be added include all minerals, fat, starches,
sugars, nitrogen compounds, and others. Turn around time on results is less than a week. The lab has received good reports from Florida dairymen who have used the lab extensively for many years.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate.