Tropical soda apple has received considerable press the past 10 years because it is a new pasture weed and it could possibly affect the shipment of Florida cattle to other states. Although tropical soda apple can not be eradicated, UF/IFAS faculty Drs. Jeff Mullahey and Paul Mislevy have developed excellent control measures. This information can be accessed at the UF/IFAS, EDIS, publication web site.

The weed that is a much bigger problem to forage and beef production is smutgrass. It has infested thousands of acres of improved pasture throughout Florida to the extent that bahiagrass has been almost completely eliminated. Reduced bahiagrass yields result in reduced stocking rates and lower beef production.

Like tropical soda apple smutgrass can not be eradicated, but it can be controlled. The method of choice when smutgrass completely dominates a pasture is pasture renovation. To assure smutgrass set back the pasture area being renovated should be sprayed with Round-up®, then thoroughly plowed and disked to eliminate all vegetative plant material. When planted with bahiagrass seed or with stargrass, hemarthria (limpograss), or bermudagrass cuttings the desired grass will immediately dominate smutgrass and remain so for many years if properly managed.

The time to control smutgrass is before it becomes dominant. Dr. Paul Mislevy has worked with and developed procedures for controlling smutgrass with the herbicide Velpar®. Detailed information first published in the Florida Cattlemen and Livestock Journal and can be accessed from the Range Cattle REC web site: http://rcrec-ona.ifas.ufl.edu/orep.html.
Dr. Mislevy found that Velpar® gives 90 to 100% control of smutgrass when properly applied. He recommends that Velpar® be applied only in July, August, and early September when the soil is moist and there is a good chance of rainfall. Moisture is needed to move Velpar® into the root zone which is necessary for killing smutgrass.

One precaution, Velpar® will kill oak trees when applied near their root area.

A second publication providing details on controlling smutgrass can be accessed at the UF/IFAS, EDIS, publication site: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_AA261. This article is authored by Drs. Martin Adjei, Paul Mislevy, and others. In addition to chemical control the article also discusses mowing and burning smutgrass which results in the regrowth of palatable and nutritious smutgrass leaves for short periods in the spring.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate.