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### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR PALMETTO CONTROL ON RANGE**

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Roller chopping range for saw palmetto control is probably the most expensive range management practice ranchers can do, but it can also result in dramatic positive changes in range forage production.

Dr. Walter Prevatt, economist at the Bradenton Research Center who has worked with me on some of my range projects, has calculated in 1985 that chopping at \$9.71/A with a five year life of improvement has an amortized cost of 58¢/A with a annual net return (before tax) of \$2.06/ A. Increases in total forage production of a ton of dry matter per acre are not uncommon, so chopping has potential to be a real economical practice for cattle production on range.

I don't think chopping range always results in a return, and in some cases the practice can set a range program back if not used properly. Simply said, there are three points ranchers should consider before undertaking roller chopping for range improvement.

First, have a grazing plan in effect before chopping. You must be able to keep the cattle off the range during the growing season after chopping. Usually, this is done by rotating cattle to pasture in summer. When you chop, desirable grasses, such as creeping bluestem, spread into open areas and other seed producing grasses like chalky bluestem and indiagrass colonize areas previously dominated by palmetto. If grazing is not controlled, many of these desired grasses will not increase or they can be grazed-out.

Second, make sure you have a source of desirable grasses on the range before chopping. Look under palmettos for the bluestems and indiagrass, because that is where they will be found if they are there, protected from grazing. If they aren't present to some extent before chopping, it isn't likely they will be abundant after treatment. I've treated such

areas and have obtained excellent palmetto control with concurrent increases in grass yield, but the grasses were bottlebrush three-awn, broomsedge and low-panicums, which are not palatable in winter and are low yielding. Paying for the chopper through cattle wouldn't be too likely in this case.

Third, be sure the size and cover from palmetto warrants control. This is a judgment that isn't easy to make, but as a rule-of-thumb, waist-high palmettos (30") with few open areas on the range constitute a limitation to forage production. A solid cover of 30" palmettos block 50 percent of sunlight, which is the point at which bluestem yields are substantially reduced.