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## **Smutgrass Control in Pangolagrass**

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Smutgrass is a serious weed problem in many pangolagrass pastures in peninsular Florida. There are two main species of smutgrass found in pangolagrass pastures and along roadsides. Both smutgrass species are perennial bunch-type plants. *Sporobolus indicus* is the shorter type (1.5 to 2.5 ft. tall) with narrow leaves and short branches on the head that is named for the dark-colored fungus which is often found in the seed heads. The second species of smutgrass (*Sporobolus jacquemontii*) is a taller plant (three to four feet) that has an open type seed head generally with no fungus and leaves appear to be larger and wider than the shorter type. The reddish smutgrass seeds which may remain attached to the seed head for some time after maturing, are spread mainly by adhering to livestock, by water, or wind, and remain viable two or more years.

Smutgrass produces in excess of 45,000 seeds per plant with over 1,400 seeds per head. Seed production takes place continuously throughout the growing season with natural germination averaging less than nine percent. Smutgrass plants are generally unpalatable to cattle. However, cattle will readily consume the regrowth of smutgrass for about two weeks following a burn or mowing. During this two-week period the quality of smutgrass is equal to bahiagrass. Research at Ona in the late 1960's indicated mowing did not control smutgrass, but helped to spread the smutgrass seed. Cultivation and complete renovation was expensive and gave variable and unsatisfactory results.

Recent studies indicate broadcast spraying in July, August or early September (when adequate moisture is available and plants are actively growing) with 0.5 lb. active Velpar(R) per acre plus 0.25 percent X-77 spreader (one quart of X-77 per 100 gallons water) resulted in 90 percent smutgrass (short type) control.

When treating smutgrass with Velpar growing in association with pangolagrass be sure the pangolagrass is mature and headed. If smutgrass is treated in pangolagrass pastures when pangolagrass is in the young vegetative stage (six to 12 inches tall) the Velpar will kill the pangolagrass. If pangolagrass pastures contain a mixture of *S. indicus* (short type) and *S. jacquemontii* (fall type) 0.75 lb/A active Velpar plus 0.25 percent X-77 will be required for control. The Velpar rate could cause some pangolagrass damage, which will recover with adequate fertilizer.

Commercial growers must remember timing of this reduced rate of Velpar is extremely important. The application of 0.5 lb/A active Velpar in June when soil conditions are dry and plants are making little growth resulted in poor (65 percent) smutgrass (short type) control. Therefore, it is extremely important to apply Velpar during midsummer when soils are wet for best smutgrass control.

Remember Velpar will kill oak trees and orange trees, therefore, caution must be exercised, when spraying smutgrass near these types of trees. Consult the Velpar label for other restrictions. For additional information call the Ona Research and Educational Center at 941 735-1314.