

# ONA REPORTS

*published in*

***THE FLORIDA CATTLEMAN AND LIVESTOCK JOURNAL***

**March-1996**

## **Now is the Time to Fertilize Your Bahiagrass Pastures**

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It is now time to consider what fertilization practices you want to follow on your bahiagrass pastures. In these times of low cattle prices and escalating costs of fertilizers it is necessary to carefully evaluate what you want to spend on pasture management in the hope of greater profits from increased pasture and cattle production. One needs to carefully evaluate the cost of the fertilizer and what type of a realistic return can be expected. University of Florida (IFAS) researchers and extension agents have been reevaluating the fertilizer recommendations for bahiagrass pastures for the past nine years. It has now been concluded that the past University fertilizer recommendations could be reduced substantially without affecting grass and cattle production in south Florida.

Current fertilizer recommendation for bahiagrass pastures are as follows. There are three nitrogen options to choose from for pasture production. These options are based on the amount of pasture grass one wants to obtain. The low nitrogen option recommends that one apply only 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre in one application without the addition of phosphorus, potassium or micro nutrients. The medium nitrogen recommendation suggests 100 pounds of nitrogen be applied per acre in one application and the high nitrogen option recommends 160 pounds of nitrogen be applied per acre in one application. Both the medium and high nitrogen options also suggest low levels of phosphorus and potassium be included. It is also recommended that the target soil pH be 5.5. However, there are no research data to supported an economic response to either phosphorus or potassium, to the two higher nitrogen levels under grazing conditions, or liming to a soil pH of 5.5.

There is research evidence to support that possibly the only economical fertilization practice for bahiagrass pastures is 50 to 60 pounds of nitrogen per acre applied in late February or March. There is also research evidence to support that bahiagrass will not

respond to lime if the soil pH is above 5.0. These field data were collected at the Range Cattle REC and on a number of ranches in south Florida by the South Florida Beef/Forage Extension Group.

Studies are under way to reexamine the fertilizer recommendations for other grasses and legumes grown in Florida to develop the most cost-effective fertilization practices for cattlemen. Present results suggest that under grazing conditions current fertilizer recommendations for other forages may be reduced.