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Smutgrass Control in Bahiagrass Pastures

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Smutgrass is a serious weed problem in many Florida pastures. The two main species of smutgrass found in Florida are 1) *Sporobolus indicus* (small smutgrass) and 2) *Sporobolus indicus* var. *pyramidalis* (giant smutgrass). Both smutgrass species are perennial bunch plants. Small smutgrass is often affected with a black fungus which is found on the seed heads giving them a spike like appearance. Giant smutgrass generally has an open type seed head with no fungus and broad leaf blades at the base of the plant. The reddish smutgrass seeds which may remain attached to the seed head for sometime after maturing, are spread mainly by adhering to livestock, by water, or wind and may remain viable for two or more years.

Smutgrass produces in excess of 45,000 seeds per plant with over 1400 seeds per head. Seed production takes place continuously throughout the growing season with natural germination averaging less than 9% because of a hard seed coat. Mature smutgrass plants are generally unpalatable to cattle. However, cattle will readily consume the regrowth of smutgrass for several weeks following a burn or mowing. During this period of young vegetative growth the quality is about equal to bahiagrass.

Research indicated mowing did not control smutgrass; but helped to spread the smutgrass seed. Under continuous close mowing plant diameter decreased but number of plants increased. When mowing stopped, plants recovered to their former density. Cultivation and complete renovation was expensive and gave variable and unsatisfactory results.

Studies at Ona indicate broadcast spraying in July, August and early September (when adequate moisture is available and plants are actively growing) with 1.0 lb/A active Velpar[®], plus 0.1% v/v silicone surfactant resulted in 90+% control of the giant smutgrass growing in association with bahiagrass. Since giant and small smutgrass types

are generally found growing together, the same recommended rate for both the giant and small smutgrass types should be used.

Mowing smutgrass to a 3" stubble and allowing plants to regrow back to a 12" height prior to spraying with 1.0 lb/A active Velpar resulted in no improvement in smutgrass control when compared with the non-mowed treatment. Mowing had no effect on bahiagrass recovery with mowed and non-mowed treatments averaging 84 and 85% bahiagrass ground cover 1 year after treatment. This was more than a 50% increase in bahiagrass ground cover 12 months after the herbicide application. If smutgrass density is greater than 80%, growers should consider pasture renovation since little bahiagrass is available for recovery after smutgrass is killed.

Bahiagrass will turn slightly yellow about 15 to 20 days after being treated with Velpar. However, about 40 days after Velpar application bahiagrass will turn dark green. This green color will be darker than the non-treated pastures.

Commercial applicators and growers must remember Velpar will kill oak trees, therefore caution must be exercised when spraying smutgrass in bahiagrass pastures with oak trees. Velpar will also hurt pangolagrass and selected cultivars of *Cynodon* grasses. Consult the Velpar label for other restrictions.