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## **How Good is Okeechobee Stargrass?**

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In the late 1970's Callie bermudagrass sometimes called Giant Callie was introduced to the Florida growers as a super grass that grew several inches per day. This grass was propagated and planted by many growers around the state. The grass produced good yields and good quality forage but persistence was a problem. As growers propagated this grass it became contaminated with a strain of stargrass which is now called Okeechobee stargrass. The stargrass had good persistence, therefore as the Callie bermudagrass died (poor persistence), stargrass filled in the void areas un-be-known to commercial growers. Within several years commercial growers were propagating all stargrass with little or no Callie bermudagrass. Commercial pastures that growers insisted were planted to Callie bermudagrass are in fact mostly Okeechobee stargrass. Callie bermudagrass can be identified by locating a large plant in the field and removing it along with about a 12" diameter block of soil 8" deep. Shake or wash the soil off the roots and look for large, pencil size, rhizomes (underground stems). Callie bermudagrass has rhizomes and stargrass does not.

In August 1996 Okeechobee stargrass was obtained from Dry Lake Dairy and planted in a "mob grazing" study at Ona along with Florona stargrass for comparison. Grasses were grazed at 2, 4, 5, and 7 wk grazing frequencies (GF) over a 3 yr period. Results indicate dry matter yields were similar between Florona and Okeechobee stargrass averaging 3.1 and 3.0 (2 wk), 5.3 and 4.6 (4 wk), 5.8 and 5.3 (5 wk) and 6.7 and 6.8 T/A (7 wk GF), respectively.

Crude protein concentration (2-yr average from June through November) ranged from 14.3% (2 wk), 14.0% (4 wk), 12.6% (5 wk) down to 11.0% (7 wk GF) for both grasses. Generally Florona stargrass will average about 1.0% CP higher than Okeechobee stargrass regardless of harvest frequency. The forage digestibility of these two grasses

appears to be 3 to 4 percentage units higher for Okeechobee stargrass than for Florona stargrass. The in vitro organic matter digestion (IVOMD) for Florona and Okeechobee averaged 53.9 and 57.8% (2 wk), 54.8 and 56.0% (4 wk), 53.3 and 56.8% (5 wk) , and 48.1 and 52.2% (7 wk GF), respectively.

Both stargrasses were extremely persistent averaging 100% pure stand of Florona stargrass and 99% pure stand of Okeechobee stargrass after 3 yr grazing. Winter forage production was about the same for both stargrasses.

In summary, Okeechobee stargrass appears to be an excellent yielding, persistent stargrass, with good nutritional value.