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TIFTON 9 COMPARED WITH PENSACOLA BAHIAGRASS

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Bahiagrass is a long lived perennial grass which occupies about 2.5 million acres of Florida pasture. The most popular cultivars in Florida are Pensacola, Argentine, and Paraguay 22. However, in recent years a new cultivar called Tifton 9 was developed by Dr. G.W. Burton in Tifton, Georgia. In 1984, Tifton 9 and Pensacola bahiagrass were established and tested for seedling vigor, yield and forage quality at the AREC, Ona. Both bahiagrasses were grazed at two, three, five and seven week intervals over a three year period. Fertilization practices were a total of 120-40-80 pounds per acre N-P2O5-K2 applied in three uniform applications.

Results indicate Tifton 9 had exceptionally good seedling vigor. Five weeks after a mid-August seeding, plant height for Tifton 9 was over five inches tall which was double that of Pensacola. Forage dry matter production from this experiment indicated Tifton 9 produced about 30 percent higher dry matter yield than Pensacola, irrespective of the time of year when harvested. When bahiagrass growth was allowed to accumulate between December and late April, Tifton 9 produced 30 percent higher dry matter yield than Pensacola. Average dry matter production for Tifton 9 between May and December was 4.6 tons per acre which again was about a 27 percent increase over Pensacola.

Rest period between grazings tended to be an important factor regarding forage production. No difference in fall (October-December) dry forage production between the two grasses was obtained when grasses were grazed every two weeks, however, allowing three, five, and seven weeks rest between grazing resulted in a 40+ percent dry matter yield increase in favor of Tifton 9 over Pensacola.

Forage quality for Tifton 9 and Pensacola was about equal for both crude protein and digestibility. Crude protein ranged form 9.5 to 14 percent and digestibility from 50 to 60 percent depending on rest period between grazing and time of year samples were taken.

From current information available we estimate that the rate of gain for cattle grazing Tifton 9 will be similar to gains that have been obtained by cattle grazing Pensacola bahiagrass. However, a heavier stocking rate may be possible with Tifton 9 than with other bahiagrasses.

Presently no performance data for cattle grazing Tifton 9 are available from the AREC, Ona. Several pastures will be seeded during the summer of 1990 to compare the performance of cattle grazing Tifton 9 and Pensacola. If additional information is desired, do not hesitate to contact the AREC, Ona, (941) 735-1314.