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Cattle Prefer Bigalta Limpograss

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Limpograss (*Hemarthria altissima*) is known for some of its distinct characteristics. The fine-stemmed, red-tented Cultivar Redalta limpograss is known by many as an unpalatable grass. Most other pasture grasses, and at times many weeds, are grazed in preference to Redalta. Bigalta limpograss sometimes referred to as "big-stemmed hemarthria" is primarily known for a lack of persistence under grazing. Obviously it is not unpalatable to cattle. The most recently released limpograss Cultivar, Floralta limpograss, is very similar in appearance to Bigalta. However, it has the advantage of being more persistent under grazing, partially due to lower palatability. While the similar names and similar appearance of the two big stemmed cultivars may lead to confusion, performance differences suggest that it is important to distinguish between the two for satisfactory grazing results.

When grazed in a common pasture by yearling heifers, Bigalta areas including considerable amounts of stem were grazed to a short stubble before any evidence of grazing was found in the Floralta. Small pastures of Bigalta and Floralta at the Ona Agricultural Research Center were stocked with crossbred yearling steers in May and June of 1986 and 1987. Pastures of each Cultivar were evaluated at two stocking rates. The heavy stocking rate resulted in use of essentially all forage in the Bigalta treatment. Floralta at the same stocking rate was grazed only moderately. At the light stocking rate, sufficient forage was available throughout the grazing period on both cultivars for cattle to perform according to the quality of the forage. At the heavy stocking rate, average daily gains of yearling' steers on Bigalta were 0.8 pounds compared to 0.4 pounds on Floralta. At the light stocking rate, gains on Bigalta were 1.2 pounds with 0.7 pounds average daily gain on Floralta. While forage I quality affecting animal performance is often considered in terms of crude protein and TDN or digestibility, intake or the amount consumed by the grazing animals is also an important measure of forage quality. At least part of the difference in gain between cultivars was due to lower intakes of the less

palatable Floralta. Results from a number of experiments have shown that Floralta is similar to or only slightly less than Bigalta in digestibility. However, crude protein levels of Floralta under some conditions are considerably below those of Bigalta, perhaps affecting intake.

These results should not be used as reasons not to plant Floralta. Floralta is rapidly proving itself as a persistent, extended-season pasture grass for cow herds on flatwoods soils. Performance of mature cows on Floralta during the normal pasture growing season has been comparable to that on well-managed bahiagrass pastures. In addition, grazing is available about two months earlier in the year and extends about two months longer for Floralta than for bahiagrass in central Florida. Thus, Floralta is of value for both summer pasture and reduction of the winter pasture deficit.

Bigalta is of value because of good forage quality which can be maintained as stockpiled forage through deferment of grazing in late summer and fall. Bigalta can be effectively managed for young growing cattle. The primary management considerations for sustained production from Bigalta include initial selection of appropriate site (wet, but not flooded for extended periods) and extended periods of deferment from grazing during the growing season. While Bigalta is suited to a narrower range of sites and requires more management than Floralta limpograss or bahiagrass, the performance advantage with young growing cattle could be worth the additional requirements.