

ONA REPORTS

published in

THE FLORIDA CATTLEMAN AND LIVESTOCK JOURNAL

June-1990

STARGRASS MANAGEMENT

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Stargrasses are perennial grasses that are closely related to bermudagrass. Generally stargrasses have no rhizomes (underground stems) but spread rapidly by long, robust stolons (runners), which could attain 15 to 20 feet in 30 days, with no vegetative competition. Stargrass planted in clean, moist, well prepared land, rolled and fertilized can develop into a dense stand of grass 24 inches tall in 90 days. For rapid development, newly planted stargrass should be fertilized with 30-40-40 lb/A N-P2O5-K2O plus micronutrients if needed when first signs of growth appear (two weeks). A second application of 50 to 60 lb/A N and 40 lb/A K2O should be applied 30 to 40 days after the initial application. To control broadleaf weeds apply one quart per acre Weedmaster or equivalent when first signs of growth appear or two weeks after planting. Newly planted stargrass should not be mowed the first year of planting, however the grass can be grazed back to a 10 inch stubble about 90 days after planting, followed by a second grazing four to five weeks later, again down to a 10 inch stubble. Most stargrasses are sensitive to cold and should not be grown where temperatures fall below 22°F.

Management practices for established (one year after planting) stargrass include annual fertilization of 180-40-80 lb N-P2O5-K2O. For best results this fertilizer rate should be applied in equal portions in early March, late June and mid September.

Stargrasses perform best when managed under a rotational grazing system. Research results indicate rotational grazing using a three-pasture rotation, with a four week rest period between each grazing results in excellent quality forage (nine to 14 percent crude protein and 56 to 60 percent digestibility), good yield, and persistence. One of the most important factors relating to the persistence of stargrasses is stubble height. Grazing these grasses back to a six to 10 inch stubble results in excellent persistence. The height of the grass above the stubble before grazing is not important for persistence but is important for forage yield and quality. Allowing stargrasses to attain between six to 18 inches above the stubble results in good yields of quality forage. When mowing these grasses for

hay, growers should strive to maintain a stubble height of about four inches. Since forage quality drops rapidly after a frost, growers should allow cattle to consume all available forage before Christmas.

Animal performance from stargrasses has been good averaging 0.9 to 1.2 pounds per day gain from May to December, with a stocking rate of two to three 600 pound steers per acre. Live weight gain per acre has ranged from 525 to 720 pounds over a 200 day warm season grazing period. It should be remembered that there are variations in yield, quality, persistence and animal performance between stargrasses. For information regarding a specific stargrass, growers are urged to contact the AREC, Ona or obtain circulars S-361 and S-362 through your county agricultural extension office.