

# ONA REPORTS

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## **'Suerte', A Lucky Find for Florida Pastures**

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In February 1990, a small packet of grass seed was sent to Al Kretschmer at the IFAS Research Center at Ft. Pierce. At first, the seeds were not planted because the grass, as identified on the label, was known to be of little value. Maybe the first stroke of luck was that the seeds were planted at all. The second stroke of luck was that the grass turned out to be a different one than indicated on the label. It was a new grass, *Paspalum atratum* (no common name), that had not been evaluated as a pasture grass. Small plots to test the grass were established at the Range Cattle Experiment Station at Ona and at the Ft. Pierce REC, and later, after sufficient seed was harvested, pastures were seeded to test the grass with cattle. We soon realized that we had something promising, and had indeed been lucky. For lack of any other name, we dubbed our find "Luckygrass" or "Suerte," which means "luck" in Spanish.

Suerte is a perennial bunch grass that grows well on wet, flatwoods pastures, and is not recommended for dry sites. It has been tested from Jay, in the Panhandle, where it has survived three winters (coldest day was 20°F), to Immokalee, near the Everglades. Seeded at five pounds/acre in mid-June, it establishes to the point where it can be grazed by September 1 st. It remains very leafy during the spring and summer, and can set seed in October. Little winter production can be expected, and the leaves are very frost sensitive. In grazing trials at Ona, 2-year average daily gains on yearling steers (initial weight 540 pounds) was 1.2 pounds./head/day over 168-day seasons with live weight gains of 580 pounds/acre. On a 40-acre seed field, 80 heifers (average weight 670 pounds) grazed from April 25 to August 23,1994, when they were removed to allow for a seed harvest, and they gained an average 1.25 pounds/head/day over the 119-day period. Since Suerte has only been tested for four years, the answer to the question of how long a pasture will last, is four years. If a rancher starts with a good stand initially, stocks the pasture at the equivalent of 2.5 yearlings/acre or a cow and calf/acre from April to November, Suerte will remain competitive with bahiagrass and common bermudagrass. It

has no serious pest or disease problems, and given proper management, it will reseed itself, and stands can actually improve. We do not see Suerte as a "miracle grass" that will replace bahiagrass as the major pasture grass in Florida, but Suerte can be a valuable part of a pasture program where high nutrition is needed. Suerte is a protected variety owned by the University of Florida, and will be only sold as certified seed through the following seedsmen: Hancock Farm & Seed, Haile-Dean Seed Co., Jack Melton Family, Inc., C.M. Payne & Son, and Wise Seed Company. Commercial quantities of seed will be available in 1996.