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Preparing Limpograss for Winter Grazing

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Floralta limpograss (*Hemarthria*) produces 30 to 35 percent of its annual production between November and March and maintains a level of TDN well above that of other mature tropical grasses. This makes it a grass that is better suited for winter use than most other perennial grasses in Florida. Other points that have made limpograss popular are its persistence and high production with relatively low levels of N fertilization. On the other hand, limpograss is low in crude protein and can be fairly unpalatable as a mature stockpiled grass. Perhaps some of these negative points could be overcome with management.

Research on stockpiling limpograss has focused on time of deferral during the growing season and N fertilization before the stockpiling period. In this small plot research, limpograss was clipped throughout summer and after August fertilization, the stockpiled grass came from fall growth. What seems to be happening today is that ranchers are deferring limpograss use through most of the summer and are beginning the fall stockpile period with grass more than 100 days of age. Many ranchers indicate that cattle refuse to eat this stockpiled grass and large amounts are lost to trampling.

Ungrazed limpograss grown without fertilization during summer yields from 2 to 4 tons/A in August and contains 1.5 to 3 percent crude protein and TDN at 40 to 43 percent. When fertilized with 50 lb N /A in August or October, yield will not be increased by much more than a ton/ A of dry matter. Fertilization will increase crude protein and TDN in this mass of forage, but by only 1 percent and 4 percent, respectively. These are small improvements for the dollars spent for fertilizer. Research indicates that limpograss that is used in the summer and is cut and fertilized with 60 lb N/A in August and allowed to regrow for 60 and 90 days, will produce 2 and 3.5 tons dry matter/A, respectively, of new forage containing 6 percent crude protein and 64 and 58 percent, respectively, TDN.

Although crude protein is still low, palatability of relatively immature grass would be much better than very old grass that had accumulated all summer.

We need to reevaluate how we graze limpograss in summer to prepare it for fall and winter grazing. One option is to graze limpograss longer in the spring and early summer instead of rotating onto bahiagrass. It may be better to fertilize limpograss in March instead of bahiagrass and rotate cows onto bahiagrass in June when it really starts to grow. Limpograss pastures need to be worked into the rotation with bahiagrass throughout the summer so large amounts of limpograss do not accumulate before it is fertilized in fall. Another option, is to graze limpograss through the summer with replacement heifers receiving protein supplementation, something that has shown promise in research at Ona.