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Gain An Advantage On Pasture Renovation By Using Winter Annuals

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Pasture renovation is one of the most expensive cultural practices facing commercial growers. Pasture renovation costs could range from \$130 per acre for seeded grasses to \$175 per acre for sprigged grasses on previously established south Florida flatwoods. Permanent pastures are renovated due to loss of desirable species or simply to change from one forage plant to another.

Normally, commercial growers consider pasture renovation one to 30 days prior to re-establishment of the pasture. Under most conditions the existing pasture is tilled several times with a large disk, allowed to dry for one to four weeks and then seeded or planted. However, these pasture renovation procedures are conducted after summer rains begin, making it difficult to dry out the existing vegetation. Consequently, new desired cultivars are seeded or planted in a poorly prepared seedbed resulting in failures or plant stands that are seriously contaminated with weeds.

Studies have shown that pasture renovation initiated six to eight months prior to actual re-establishment of the desirable perennial species could provide excellent winter forage and lead to the successful development of a warm season perennial grass or legume.

The following steps should be followed when using winter annuals in a pasture renovation program.

1. Determine which pastures need to be renovated six to eight months prior to summer planting.
2. Use a moldboard plow to initiate the tillage process. In central and south Florida start tillage between November first and November 15.

3. Disk at least once to smooth land area.
4. Seed and disk winter annual grasses 0.5 to 0.75 inches deep on the same day that the pasture is plowed, and immediately pack soil extremely firm, to conserve moisture.
5. Fertilize winter annual grasses within a week after emergence.
6. Initiate grazing when plants are about 10 to 12 inches.
7. Soon after winter annuals die in the spring, plow or disk pasture (April) and repeat disking process approximately once monthly. This repeated tillage process dries out the unwanted common bermudagrass and other weeds during the dry season, providing a clean seed bed.
8. When summer rains begin, plant or seed desirable perennial grasses, then firmly pack the seedbed.

Advantages

1. This program allows growers to seed winter annuals into a tilled seedbed with an excellent chance for success.
2. Immediate seeding and packing after three to seven days regardless of rainfall.
3. Fall tillage allows the grower to apply dolomite and adequate time to increase pH.
4. Grazing plowing (November) allows Sod to decompose and release some nutrients for ryegrass.
5. Early tillage allows for a well prepared seedbed for summer grasses, free of weeds.
6. Establishing winter annual grasses in clean tilled soil produces dry matter yields several times higher than when establishing them in sod.