

ONA REPORTS

published in

THE FLORIDA CATTLEMAN AND LIVESTOCK JOURNAL

November-1995

Using Winter Annual Grasses to Renovate

Perennial Grass Pastures

By Rob Kalmbacher

University of Florida, IFAS



For questions or comments regarding this publication contact

[Rob Kalmbacher](#)

The high nutritive value of winter annual grasses can promote reproduction in cows when these grasses are grazed before or during the early part of the breeding season. However, getting a return on ryegrass or small grain pasture with beef cattle in south Florida is a gamble with a lot riding on things over which the rancher has no control, such as cattle prices, weather, price of seed, fertilizer, etc.

In the past, this column addressed practices that the rancher can do to reduce the risk of failure with winter annuals, like plowing, immediately seeding, and rolling the seed bed to assure sufficient soil moisture for grass establishment. Grass variety selection and proper timing of fertilization also help move winter annual grasses into the realm of profitability. What has not been considered in the past is the value placed on winter annuals as a tool for perennial grass pasture renovation.

Twenty years ago ranchers had a choice of 'Pangola' digitgrass, 'Coastal' and 'Coastcross' bermudagrasses, or 'Bigalta' limpograss. These were in addition to bahiagrass, which will continue to be the basis of Florida's pasture program. Today, there are many new perennial grass varieties from which a south Florida rancher can select. There is 'Tifton 9' bahiagrass, two stargrass varieties ('Florico' and 'Florona'), a new bermudagrass ('Florakirk'), a limpograss ('Floralta'), a rhodesgrass ('Callide'), and most recently, a leafy bunchgrass established from seed called 'Suerte'. In the past, ranchers had the option of planting their new grasses on weed-free land converted from the native condition, but today plantings of new grasses are largely confined to renovation of old bahiagrass pastures.

Getting rid of bahiagrass to plant another grass is difficult. However, a good seedbed that offers minimal competition from bahiagrass can start with fall land preparation for a winter annual. In addition to writing-off some of the cost of establishment of a new perennial grass to the winter annual grass, starting land preparation with a winter annual results in the best possible seed bed preparation for the new perennial grass. Plowing (which is the best option) or heavy, repeated disking of bahiagrass in the fall starts the process. Competition from the growth of the winter annual grass continues the pressure on bahiagrass through the winter. Finally, after the annual has finished growing in mid-April, disking several times in the dry season puts the finishing touches on a good seed bed.

A good well-prepared, weed-free seedbed is one of the most important factors in getting an excellent stand of a new perennial grass. Starting the process with a winter annual grass is one of the best ways to do it.